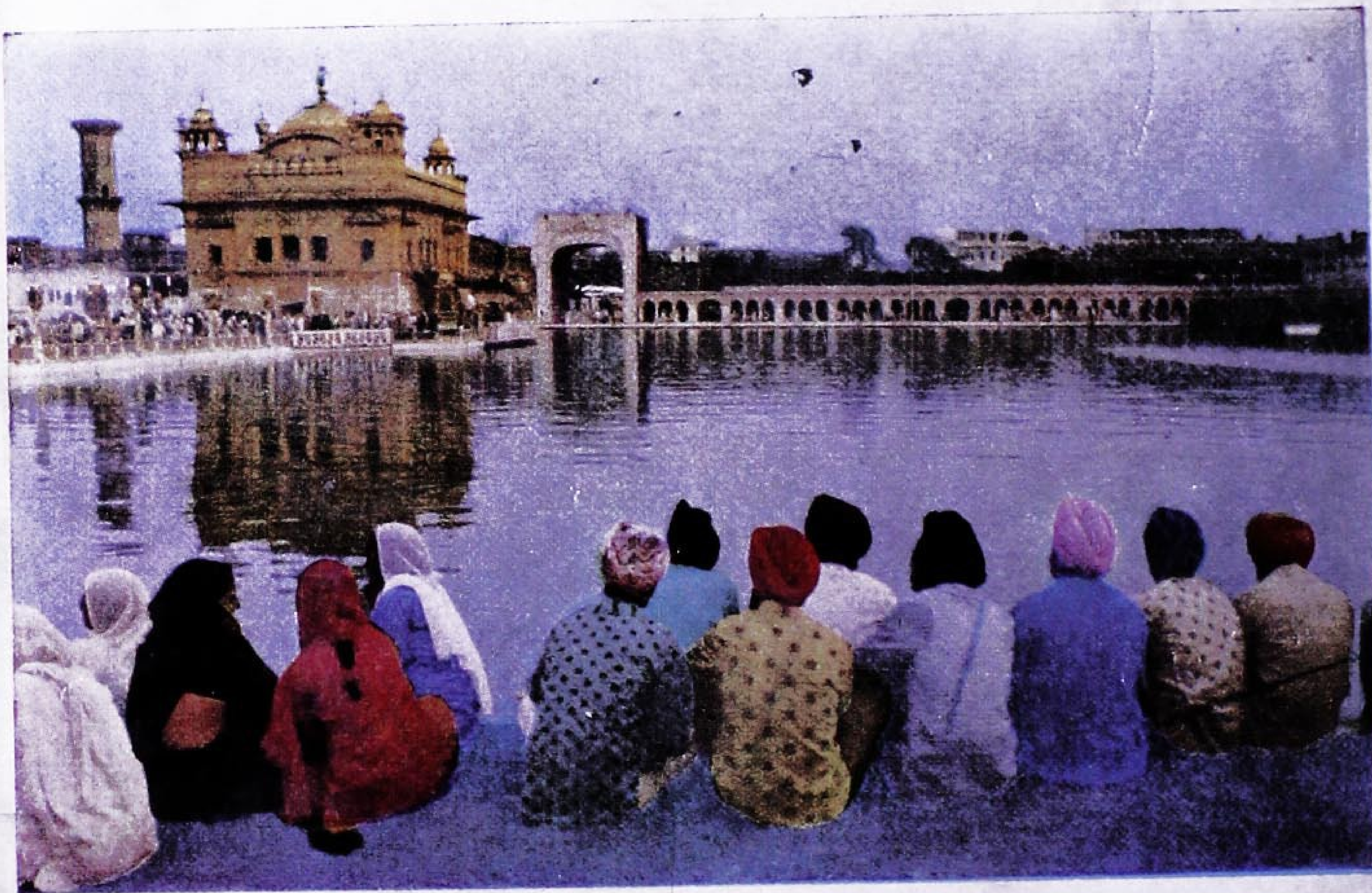
THE HERITAGE OF THE SIKHS



HARBANS SINGH

By the same author

Guru Nanak and Origins of the Sikh Faith
(also translated into Hindi and Urdu)
Guru Tegh Bahadur
Guru Gobind Singh
(also translated into Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Maithili, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Tamil and Telugu)
Maharaja Ranjit Singh
Bhai Vir Singh
(also translated into Punjabi, Marathi and French)
Aspects of Punjabi Literature
Higher Education in America
Bhai Vir Singh: Poet of the Sikhs
(in collaboration with Professor G.S. Talib)
An Introduction to Indian Religions
(in collaboration with Dr L.M. Joshi)
Perspectives on Guru Nanak (ed.)
Approaches to the Study of Religion (ed.)
Punjab Past and Present: Essays in Honour of Dr Ganda Singh (ed.)
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PREFACE

The Heritage of the Sikhs has remained out of print for nearly two decades now. This present edition is a substantially modified version and, apart from needed revisions, I have made additions using some of the materials I have published elsewhere during this interval. In addition to reworking through old texts such as the *Gurbilās Chhevin Pātshāhi* (A.D. 1718), Koer Singh's *Gurbilās Pātshāhi 10* (A.D. 1751), Kesar Singh Chhibbar's *Bansāvalināmā* (A.D. 1769), Sarūp Dās Bhallā's *Mahimā Prakāsh* (A.D. 1776), Sukkhā Singh's *Gurbilās Dasvin Pātshāhi* (A.D. 1797), Ratan Singh Bhangū's *Prāchin Panth Prakāsh* (A.D. 1841) and Santokh Singh's *Sri Gur Pratāp Sūraj Granth* (A.D. 1843), a new source—the Bhatt Vahīs and the *Gurū kiān Sākhiān* (MS.)—brought to light recently by Giānī Garjā Singh has been drawn upon to reconstruct the history of early Sikhism. Most of the dates connected with the lives of the Gurus, Guru Hargobind to Guru Gobind Singh, I owe to this source. The first edition ended with the partition of the Punjab in 1947. Two more chapters now trace the process of Sikh remobilization thereafter and the fulfilment reached with the formation in 1966 of a Punjabi-speaking state. Documentation is, again, missing, though a bibliography has been added this time.

A-1, Punjabi University Campus
Patiala
March 6, 1983

HARBANS SINGH

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

The word *sikh* goes back to Sanskrit *shishya*, meaning a disciple or learner. In Pali, *shishya* became *sissa*. The Pali word *sekha* (also *sekkha*) means a pupil or one under training in a religious doctrine (*sikkhā*, *shikshā*). This was the Pali form of Punjabi *sikh*. The term Sikh, in the Punjab, came to be used for the disciples of Guru Nānak and his nine spiritual successors.

The Sikhs—today a well-knit community of more than ten million—are a unique people in the religious civilization of the world. Practical and progressive in their outlook, they are deeply attached to their faith. Religious belief is their living impulse and the mainspring of their national characteristics and history.

Sikhism had its birth in the Punjab and most of its followers live in this state; yet many have migrated to other parts of India and to countries abroad. Wherever they may live, Sikhs are easily recognized by their beards and turbans. They value these as the signs of their religious faith. As their history reveals, their religious forms and symbols have been of supreme importance to them. They give them a sense of identity and are an essential part of the Sikh way of life.

The Sikhs are widely known as good soldiers and farmers. In a foreign land a Sikh may be hailed as a representative of the oriental princely order—such is his physical mien and stature. Tribute has not been lacking for Sikhs' handsome beards and headgear and for their qualities of courage and adventure, but appreciation of the underlying sources of their inspiration and tradition has generally been rather limited.

The Sikhs are a deeply devoted people and faith is an essential trait of their nature. An immense reserve of spiritual energy has been their strong asset in many a crisis during their 500-year-old history. In the latest, when at the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 nearly one-third of the community

was reduced to a homeless and landless refugee population, they exhibited great recuperative power. The Radcliffe line, which marked off the two sovereign States of India and Pakistan from each other, ran through the middle of the Sikh population. Migrating *en masse* from what then became the West Punjab province of Pakistan, the uprooted sections of the community re-established themselves gradually, but securely, in their new homeland. A firm and unflinching faith was their sole support in that most trying situation.

Rather than produce any truculent or fanatical spirit, the Sikhs' religious zeal has resulted in some shining deeds of heroism and sacrifice. For, at the root of their history lie simple virtues such as tolerance, compassion and service, so sedulously inculcated by their Gurus, or prophet-teachers.

The foundation of the Sikhs' central shrine—the Golden Temple at Amritsar—was laid at the request of their Fifth Guru by a Muslim Sufi. In the Sikhs' holy book are hymns composed by pious men, Hindus as well as Muslims. It also contains verses by the outcaste Shūdras. The Fifth Guru, who compiled the Sikh Scripture, broke through these divisions and gave an honoured place to the compositions of holy men from other traditions beside his own and those of his four spiritual predecessors. The resultant Ādi [Guru] Granth, the Original Book, is unique among the world's religious scriptures for its mystical ardour and catholicity of design.

When, after a long period of desperate and bold struggle against religious persecution, the Sikhs succeeded, towards the end of the eighteenth century, in establishing their own rule in the Punjab, they readily forgave their Muslim persecutors and treated them with utmost tolerance and friendliness. Ranjīt Singh, the Sikh sovereign of the Punjab, was a ruler of liberal vision and maintained a cosmopolitan court. His most trusted minister was a Muslim, Faqīr Azīz-ud-Dīn, who was also his personal physician and tested his master's food every day before it was served to him. Rājā Dīnā Nāth, a Hindu, was the finance minister. Among Ranjīt Singh's army officers were Frenchmen, Italians, Americans, Poles, Greeks, Russians and Englishmen, besides, of course, Hindus, Gurkhas and Muslims.

Heirs to such liberal traditions, the Sikhs are bound by no

strict dogma or ritual. They recognize no caste divisions. They must not, of course, smoke, nor cut or trim their beards and hair. These are the inviolable injunctions of Sikh discipline as laid down by the Guru and are followed by the faithful with the reverence due the Master's command.

The Sikhs' outward symbols have played a significant part in their national history. They impart to them unity and a distinct individuality and have preserved them from being assimilated within the larger Indian complex of Hinduism, a ready absorbent of races and creeds. Important as this external form is, the essential fact about the Sikhs is the moral prestige they have acquired from their steadfast and, often, severely trying adherence to their religious faith.

The first date in Sikh history is 1469—the year in which the founder of the faith, Guru Nānak, was born. That was a stirring period of time. The mutual confrontation of two vital, but in several ways contradictory, culture forms represented by Hinduism and Islam was the central fact of the contemporary situation. The two streams had been running their parallel course since the beginning of the Muslim invasions in the eighth century. Points of contact were scanty and such as did emerge in course of time had produced only tenuous forms of coalition. Marks of mutual concession were not entirely missing: developments, in fact, did take place in the social, cultural and religious spheres pointing towards a synthesis. But somehow the process remained unrealized. India had not encountered such a situation before.

The Muslims brought with them the enthusiasm of a newly acquired faith and an outlook completely different from that of the Hindus on many fundamental points. Hinduism at that time was polytheistic, iconographic and ascetical, whereas Islam was monotheistic, iconoclastic and socially motivated and practical. The former was tolerant in its religious attitude, but had developed a rigidly corseted social structure; the latter had a liberal social system, but was bigoted and fanatical in its religious belief. The coming together of two such diverse peoples, of two such mutually exclusive viewpoints was one of history's most sensitive and vital moments. The situation had possibilities for both creative synthesis and rejective hostility.

The creative impulse of the times met with its fullest

expression in Guru Nānak and received from him a definite stamp and direction. Affirmation and integration were the qualities of the religious prophecy he embodied. He presented a living and intensely realized ideal of faith and spiritual deliverance, of human equality and justice. The historical conditions of the period, its urges and aspirations, were brought to a positive focus in his discerning vision. The pangs and afflictions of the time touched his compassionate heart. From the prevalent trends, some of them still vague and tentative, he evolved a complete, full-faced view of existential reality and the principles of belief and of moral and magnanimous action. In this lay the seed of a vital religious and social revolution.

Guru Nānak's teaching, sharing some of the aspects of Hindu and Muslim practice, had its own transcendent and dynamic character. The chief doctrines preached by him were "the unity of God, brotherhood of man, rejection of caste and the futility of idol worship." He undertook long journeys to spread his message. From the high Himalayas in the north to Ceylon in the south and from Assam in the east to Mecca and Baghdad in the west, he travelled arduously, accompanied by a Muslim companion, Mardānā.

Some of the notes which became current with Guru Nānak's teaching were already audible in the *milieu* in which he was born. The esoteric and mystical sects of that time—the Nāthapanthīs, the Sahajayānīs, the Kāpālikas and others—stressed the importance of inner experience. They rejected the Brahmanical system. They rejected caste, the authority of the ancient texts and the Sanskrit language. The Bhaktas and the Sufis preached a religion of devotion. They deprecated the outward masks of sanctity and the rigidity of form and ritualism. The Nirguna Sampradāya *santas*—Nāmdev, Kabīr and Ravidās—represented in their teaching and way of life a synthesis of cultic mysticism and Bhakti and Sufism. All this was part of Guru Nānak's inheritance. Yet he belonged to none of these systems or orders. He could not be aptly placed within the framework of any of these. His teaching can best be understood only in its own terms—i.e. as an autonomous revelation. Attempts at tracing kinship between Guru Nānak and Bhakti reformers and the description of Kabīr, from among them, as the "forerunner of Sikhism" will be misleading. There

is no evidence to prove that Guru Nānak and Kabīr had ever met or that the former owed anything to the latter's teachings. Kabīr's hymns figure in the Goindwāl *pothīs*. They are included in the Guru Granth as well. But this happened much later when Guru Arjun, fifth in the spiritual line from Guru Nānak, compiled the Sacred Volume. Besides his own compositions and those of his four predecessors, he entered in the Holy Book the hymns of a number of medieval saints and mystics, both Hindu and Muslim. Kabīr happened to be one of them.

While singing the praises of the Almighty in devotional hymns, Guru Nānak attacked vigorously the evils that had crept into society. His was the only strongly vocal protest in India against the invasions of Bābar, founder of the Mughal dynasty. At Eminābād, during one of his travels, he stayed with an humble carpenter, declining the invitation of a caste-proud Hindu dignitary. Seeing devotees in the temple of Jagannāth light small lamps in silver trays to propitiate the gods, he burst into a song describing how Nature's tribute to the Creator was superior to man's:

> In the disc of the sky
> The sun and the moon shine as lamps.
> The galaxy of stars twinkles like pearls,
> All ẓephyr is incense; the winds are fanning,
> All the woods are bright with flowers,
> O, Saviour of the World, Thine *āratī* (adoration)
> Is wonderful indeed!

Guru Nānak appointed one of his followers as his spiritual inheritor. The line of prophetic succession continued until the Tenth Master, Guru Gobind Singh, assumed the office of Guru. The Sikh character and organization thus developed in the care of ten successive teachers, each emphasizing a particular lesson, truly exemplified in his own life or contributing a new trait rehearsed under the stress of changing times.

The Third Guru presented the ideal of personal service, the Fifth that of sacrifice. The latter, the first martyr of the Sikh faith, was tortured to death by the command of the Mughal emperor, Jahāngīr. His example generated a new impulse for calm suffering and sacrifice which runs undiluted throughout the course of Sikh history, ennobling and animating a great

many of its pages. He also gave the Sikhs their religious Scripture, the Granth Sāhib, and their central shrine, the Harimandir at Amritsar.

His son, Guru Hargobind, Nānak VI, taught the use of arms. Seeing how peaceful resistance to oppression had proved abortive, he recognized recourse to the sword as a lawful alternative. The Ninth, Guru Tegh Bahādur, again bore the cross. Under the orders of the Mughal emperor, Aurangzib, he was beheaded in a main thoroughfare in Delhi. A *gurdwārā*, with a tall Sikh pennant fluttering above it, stands upon the spot of his martyrdom and is the Sikhs' most sacred shrine in the Indian metropolis.

Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and last of the Sikh prophets, brought to consummation the work started by Guru Nānak. He introduced the baptism of the sword and the Sikh movement reached in his time its highest fulfilment. The sect of saints and martyrs had turned into a band of bold warriors, without losing its original attributes of compassion and selflessness. The process of evolution was stepped up by the intolerance of the rulers of the day and Sikhs were engaged in many an unequal battle with them. Guru Gobind Singh's four sons, along with many of his followers, fell martyrs to the bigotry of the ruling race.

The struggle became bitter after Guru Gobind Singh's passing away in 1708. For most of the century, Sikhs suffered untold oppression. The object of the rulers was the complete extermination of the rising community. They made public slaughter of the faith. Civic life was rendered impossible for the Sikhs and they had to flee their homes, seeking shelter in hills and jungles. Rewards were offered for their heads and their *gurdwārās*, places of worship, were either barred or demolished. The word *guṛ* (molasses) was sought to be expunged from common use lest it should remind one of the Sikh *Guru*. To discountenance reference to Sikh Scripture, the word *Granth* was proscribed. The sacred pool of the Sikhs at Amritsar was filled with the debris of the temple that had stood in the middle of it since the time of the Fifth Guru. Thousands of Sikhs were apprehended and killed with the cruellest torments. Yet they remained unvanquished and their spirit only toughened under the impact of every fresh calamity.

Once Nādir Shāh, the Persian conqueror who invaded India in 1739, questioned the governor of Lahore who these Sikhs were. To which the latter made answer in this wise:

"They are a group of faqīrs who visit their Guru's tank twice a year, and, bathing in it, disappear."

"Where do they live?" asked Nādir.

"Their homes are their horses' saddles," was the reply.

"Take care, then," said Nādir, "for the day is not distant when these people will take possession of thy country."

Nādir was not far wrong in his warning. The Sikhs came out of their jungle homes to establish gradually their sway in the country. When at last Ranjīt Singh, a leader of great military prowess and political astuteness, occupied Lahore in 1799, the Sikhs had laid the foundation of a powerful kingdom.

Ranjīt Singh conquered the far-flung provinces of Multan, Peshawar and Kashmir and extended the limits of his domains in the north to Ladakh. The Sikhs built up a commanding position on the north-western frontier, checking for the first time the inflow of invaders who had incessantly swept down the hills to loot or rule India since the discovery of the route by the earlier Āryan groups about 1500 B.C. Ranjīt Singh vanquished the proud Afghans and secured from Ahmad Shāh Durrānī's heirs the peerless Koh-i-Nūr.

Sikh sovereignty did not last long. The English had by then taken almost the whole of India except the Punjab. They were chary of trying their strength with the mighty Ranjīt Singh. But, after his death in 1839, they closed in on the Sikh empire, forcing upon it two successive wars. The Sikh kingdom was annexed to the British dominions and Duleep Singh, the minor son of Ranjīt Singh, was deposed. The Koh-i-Nūr, the celebrated diamond, was taken away and presented to Queen Victoria. Kashmir was sold out to Gulāb Singh, one of Ranjīt Singh's courtiers, who had broken fealty to the Sikh sovereign in the Anglo-Sikh wars.

The loss of the Punjab was extremely galling to the Sikhs and they nursed a deep grudge against the English. But the latter won over the chiefs by settling upon them grants of land and privileges. The opening of canals in the country brought

prosperity to the farmers and traders, inducing temporarily a mood of resignation.

The Sikhs did not recover from the setback until a current of religious revival arose among them towards the end of the nineteenth century. This renaissance restored the dignity of Sikh values and resuscitated the Sikh spirit. It also gave rise to unprecedented literary and cultural activity. The Sikhs awoke to a new consciousness of their spiritual heritage and overcame the psychological after-effects of the defeat.

Fed on the reformist ideology, of the Singh Sabhā, they began to realize that their holy places had, in the hands of the old priestly class, become centres of hollow superstitious ritual which was contrary to the teaching of the Gurus. This they meant to remedy, but met with strong opposition from the government who took the part of the priests. A long, strenuous struggle ensued in which the Sikhs re-enacted their history of bold sacrifice and suffering for their faith. Thousands courted imprisonment and faced police bullets and bludgeons. During this period (1920-25); Sikhs grew politically very alive. Some of them had already been to foreign lands such as the United States and Canada and become involved in movements for India's freedom. In the United States they had founded a freedom centre which published an extremist newspaper, *Ghadr* (Revolt). The paper was banned in India, but continued to be smuggled in despite all vigilance on the part of the government. Its Punjabi version continued to be published, in different format and style though, from Los Angeles until its editor, Gyānee Bhagwān Singh Prītam, the Sikh missionary-turned-revolutionary, was in 1958 invited to return home by the Punjab chief minister, Sardār Partāp Singh Kairon (1901-65).

The Sikhs eventually won their peaceful battle against the priests and the English authority in India. They were given control of their holy places and a law was passed providing for an elected body of Sikhs for their management. This was the first major victory won by peaceful passive resistance against the foreign rulers, and the Indian leaders appreciated the Sikhs' spirit of sacrifice and tenacity.

This central administration of the holy places—some of them richly endowed with vast landed estates from the days of Sikh rule—placed in the hands of the controlling organization,

the Shiromanī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee, ample financial resources. For the first time since the days of the Dal Khālsā, which had led the Sikhs through the turbulent eighteenth century, a representative and central institution had emerged capable, by virtue of its constitution and character, of commanding the allegiance of the whole community and advancing the Sikh faith.

Politically, the Sikhs came to be divided into several mutually hostile groups, though they preserved their religious homogeneity and laid aside their differences and jealousies for the sake of a common purpose. When the British government announced in 1932 a substantial instalment of political responsibility to the Indian provinces in the form of the Communal Award, laying down each community's share in the legislative assemblies, Sikhs protested that they had been placed under perpetual communal domination of the Muslims who were in a majority in the Punjab. All Sikh groups and parties, gathered at Mahārājā Ranjīt Singh's *samādh* in Lahore, resolved to resist the implementation of the British verdict. The upper sections of the community who were generally moderate and pro-British in political opinion found themselves in agreement with the extremist school and offered to work in co-operation with it.

About subsequent British proposals to transfer power to Indians also there was a fair amount of unanimity of opinion among the Sikhs. They were, in sentiment, with the Indian National Congress and they supported it in its efforts to win freedom from the British. They were at the same time apprehensive of their own future since it had become apparent that, as a concession to Muslim stubbornness, India would ultimately be split on a communal principle, reducing their own political position to insignificance on either side of the dividing line. The British Cabinet Mission of 1946 expressed in their final proposals appreciation of Sikhs' difficulties, but regretted their inability to be of any help to them in view of their small numerical strength.

The British partitioned the country into two independent States of India and Pakistan. But the communal feeling had been worked up to such frenzy that disastrous rioting broke out on both sides of the border. In northern India it was limited to

the Punjab and a few adjoining districts of Uttar Pradesh. The Sikhs, in a hopeless minority in Pakistan Punjab, were the worst sufferers. More than two million of them had to leave their homes and lands and trudge their weary way into India under most adverse circumstances.

Today, there are few Sikhs in Pakistan. The Sikhs had always had an effective share in the police and civil administration of pre-partition Punjab. In Pakistan there is not a single Sikh government functionary now. The sacred shrines—among them the holy Nankānā—lie closed without any devotees. A visit to Nankānā Sāhib by a limited number of pilgrims on the birth anniversary of Guru Nānak may be possible now, subject, of course, to sanction by the Pakistan government.

In India, Sikhs are chiefly confined to the border state of the Punjab, though there are substantial numbers of them in the interior cities such as Delhi, Calcutta, Bombay, Patna, Kanpur and Dehra Dun. The 1947 diaspora took them to these and several other places. The Sikhs are also well known for their wanderlust and have always been foremost among Indians to seek out avenues of trade and employment in foreign lands. There are Sikh farmers in Canada and the United States, traders and businessmen in Afghanistan, Iran, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, and workers and professionals in Great Britain and East Africa. Wherever a Sikh goes, he carries his Holy Book with him and he builds his own temple. There are Sikh schools and *gurdwārās* in London, New York, Stockton and Vancouver and in towns in Iran, East Africa, Malaysia, Indonesia, Japan and the Philippines.

The Sikhs are fewer than two per cent of the Indian population, but their share in the country's life is by no means negligible. For one thing, they add colour to the scene. Upright and handsome, with a fine sense of matching colours in the clothes he wears, a Sikh is distinguishable from among a thousand. Sikhs make excellent soldiers and they proved their mettle in the two world wars and in India's recent battles against the invading armies from across the borders. They form a substantial portion of the Indian army filling posts of responsibility and occupying high positions as officers. In the civil administration also they hold many honoured appointments. Sikhs have a great natural aptitude for practical trades and crafts. They

make good engineers, craftsmen and architects. Those from non-peasant stock adapt themselves more easily to business and there are some very prosperous Sikh traders and contractors in Delhi, Amritsar and Bombay, and in Malaysia, Iran and East Africa.

The Sikhs have shown notable enterprise in the field of education. They have a higher literacy percentage than any other Indian community, barring the Parsis and the Anglo-Indians. Large numbers of Sikh young men go in for vocational and university education. Sikhs also run their own schools and colleges which share, in their name, the common appellation of "Khālsā". The Khālsā College at Amritsar, their oldest institution, is famous for its magnificent buildings and rich cultural tradition. There are Sikh colleges in Delhi, Bombay, Patna and Calcutta and in almost all important towns of the Punjab.

In the arts and literature also Sikhs have made their mark. The Gurus composed the sacred hymns in the language of the people—Punjabi—in preference to traditional medium of religious poetry and philosophy in the country. The use of the people's tongue for literary expression stimulated creative activity. The Sikhs' contribution towards the enrichment of Punjabi literature is very substantial. Bhāī Vīr Singh (1872-1957), the precursor of modern Punjabi writing, was a prolific writer. As a poet, he ranked among India's best. Sikh lore and tradition were the chief sources of his inspiration.

Mural paintings in the *gurdwārās* preserve the best specimens of Sikh art. Some excellent *motifs* can be seen in the Golden Temple at Amritsar and other old shrines. One of the modern painters, Amritā Sher-Gil, daughter of a Sikh of old lineage, Sardār Umrāo Singh Majīthīā (1870-1954), has left a deep mark on contemporary art. In her premature death in 1943, the world lost one of its most promising and original painters. Music is integral to the Sikhs' religious worship. The Sikh Scripture, the Guru Granth, is set to musical patterns and the chanting of hymns is an essential part of morning and evening services in the *gurdwārās*. There has grown up among Sikhs a class of religious minstrels who cultivate the art and help preserve the tradition of Sikh music, which in its verve and variety marks a departure from the stylized forms of the older schools.

A Sikh on the field of sport represents the finest specimen of Indian manhood. None can match his physical skill and fighting stamina. The best Indian athletes and sportsmen are the Sikhs.

The Sikh spirit shines even brighter through their womenfolk. They have played a noble part in the difficult periods of Sikh history. Sikhism has been a potent influence in the emancipation of Indian womanhood. Sikh women do not observe *purdah* (veil) and there are no restrictions on their attending or conducting prayers in the *gurdwārās*. In fact, the Sikh faith gave women equality with men and raised a strong protest against their centuries-old social disabilities.

CHAPTER II

GURU NĀNAK

Tradition and politics have played capriciously with the date and place of Guru Nānak's birth. He was born in the month of April—that is what modern research contends. But his birth anniversary has, by custom, come to be celebrated in October-November. He was born at Talwandī, Nankānā Sāhib, now in Pakistan. Since the partition of India in 1947, pilgrimage to the place has depended on diplomatic permission and procedure.

Guru Nānak was born on April 15, 1469. His father Kalyān Chand, shortened by the biographers to Kālū, of the Bedī clan of the Kshatriyas, was the village accountant and kept rent records of the estate of the local Muslim landlord. According to the Janamasākhī accounts, prodigies attended the illustrious advent. Light flashed across the mud-built room in which the birth took place. The gifted and the wise in the celestial regions and below rejoiced in the happy event. The family priest, who came to cast the child's horoscope, told Kālū that his son would sit under canopy. "Both Hindus and Turks will pay him reverence. His name will become current on earth and in heaven. The ocean will give way to him; so will the earth and the skies. He will worship and acknowledge but One Formless Lord and teach others to do so. . . . Every creature he will consider as God's very own creation."

In his village, the child Nānak was a favourite of both Hindus and Muslims. To quote from the *Meharbān Janamasākhī*, "A Hindu chancing to pass by would involuntarily exclaim, 'Great is Gobind the Lord! Such a small child and yet he speaks so auspiciously. His words are as immaculate as he is handsome. He is the image of God Himself.' And if a Turk saw him, he would remark with equal enthusiasm, 'Wonderful is Thy creation, Merciful Master! How good-looking is the

child and how polite his speech! Talking to him brings one such satisfaction. He is a noble one blessed by Almighty Allah Himself.' "

When Nānak was seven, he had to prepare to go to school. The Pandit was consulted about the day most favourable for him to begin. At school, he surprised his teacher by writing on his wooden slate what turned out to be a poem in Punjabi, a kind of acrostic which he had extemporized with verses matching each of the thirty-five letters of the alphabet. In it he had reflected upon questions far beyond his years. The main one he seemed to have in mind was: "Who is truly learned?" Certainly not one who knew the letters of the alphabet, but "he who arrives at true understanding through these." This is known to be the first of Guru Nānak's extensive compositions which have been transmitted in the original and are preserved in the Guru Granth.

As Nānak entered his eleventh year, he had attained the age when he must, according to prescribed usage, be given the *janeū*, the sacrificial cord, as a badge of the upper caste to which he belonged. At the ceremony for which his father had invited many relatives and friends, he refused to take the *janeū* and uttered the following *sabad*:

> Let compassion be thy cotton;
> Spin it into the yarn of contentment;
> Give it knots of continence
> and the twist of truth.
> Thus alone wilt thou make a *janeū* for the soul.
> If such a one thou hast, put it on me.
> The thread so made will neither snap,
> nor become soiled.
> It will neither be burnt nor lost.
> Blest is the man, O Nānak,
> Who weareth such a thread around his neck.

As a boy, he took out the family herd to pasture. Of this period the Janamasākhīs relate several miraculous stories. While out with his herd one day, Nānak, it is said, lay down to rest under a tree in the summer afternoon and fell asleep. Rāi Bulār, the Muslim owner of the village, was riding by with his servants. As he reached near the tree under which slept the weary herdsman, he suddenly reined in his horse and stopped.

He thought he had seen a strange phenomenon. The shadow of the other trees had travelled round with the sun, but not of the tree in front of which stood his horse. Rāi Bulār asked the servants to find out who slept under that tree. They said it was Kālū Bedī's son, Nānak, and raised the sleeper. Rāi Bulār alighted from his horse, embraced Nānak and kissed him on his forehead. He said to his companions, "Nānak is not empty. On him rests God's favour. Today we have seen another wonderful thing. Watch the Lord's marvel! The shade of this tree remains stationary for the blessed one. He is no ordinary mortal. Praise be to the Almighty Master!" Rāi Bulār did not mount again, but walked home instead. He called Father Kālū and said to him, "Your son is an uncommon being. He is the honour of my town. Kālū, thou hast become exalted and I am also exalted in whose town such a one has been born." Father Kālū said, "Of the things of God, God alone knows."

An ancient gnarled *van*-tree which is said to be the one that protected the Guru with its immobile shadow is still preserved in the precincts of a *gurdwārā* at Nankānā Sāhib.

Nānak was now about sixteen years of age. He stayed most of the time out of doors tending his herd of cattle, consorting with wayfaring *sādhūs* and devoting his solitude to inward communion. Then suddenly a change came upon him. He grew silent and became immersed in his own thoughts more than ever before. He did not wish to stir out of his home. He ate and drank but little and lay in bed all the time. The parents were grieved and the neighbours rumoured that something had happened to Nānak. Mother Triptā, who had in a loving way always seen a purpose in whatever her son did and never raised a cavil or question, wondered what could have been the matter. She was pained to hear the remarks of the neighbours and, one day as she saw a group of anchorites pass along the street, she felt a sudden twinge in her heart. She hurriedly went to where Nānak was and spoke to him, "Son, I have seen some mendicants, perhaps on their way to far-off places of pilgrimage. I feared my own Nānak might not take the same route one day. Like them he might not go away to visit the hallowed spots. Son, my heart is restless. I say they left their mothers behind and likewise Nānak will go, too, leaving his mother to her loneliness."

Nānak here uttered a hymn in which he said that he did not need to make any such pilgrimages. He had turned his own heart into a temple and that was the object of his adoration.

The physician who was called in held Nānak's wrist within his fingers and began to feel the pulse under them to diagnose the malady. Nānak told him that the sickness was not of the body, and broke into the following *sabad*:

> They have called the physician
> to try his physic;
> And he grips the arm and searches it
> for ailment.
> Little doth the good physician know
> That the ache is in the heart.

The physician, a wise old man, understood what Nānak meant and assured Kālū that his son needed no healing. "He is himself free from infirmity and might well a healer be for others," he said. The mood eventually resolved itself in Nānak's reverting to his usual manner.

At Sultānpur, where Nānak had gone to stay with his sister Nānakī, and where he carried on his spiritual vocation along with work in the Muslim Nawāb's *modīkhānā* or stores, he did not return home one day after his morning ablutions in the river. He remained absent for three days. This was an interval of a vivid mystical experience. The Janamasākhīs have described it in terms of a direct communion with God. The *Purātan Janamasākhī* says, "As the Lord willed, Nānak, the devotee, was escorted to His presence. Then a cup filled with *amrit* (nectar) was given him with the command, 'Nānak, this is the cup of Name-adoration. Drink it . . . I am with thee and I do bless and exalt thee. Whoever remembers thee will have My favour. Go, rejoice in My Name and teach others to do so. . . . I have bestowed upon thee the gift of My Name. . . . Let this be thy calling.' Nānak made the salutation and stood up."

The Voice spoke again, "Nānak, thou discerneth My Will." And Nānak recited what became the preamble to the opening Sikh prayer, the *Japujī*:

The One Transcendent Being,
He is Truth Eternal,
He is the Creator,
He is the Person all-pervading.
He is without fear,
He is without rancour,
He is beyond time,
He is the form that exists,
He is unborn,
He is self-existent,
Through the grace of the Guru is He realized.

The Voice was heard again: "He who is just in thine eyes, Nānak, shall be so in Mine. He who receives thy grace shall abide in Mine. My name is the Supreme Lord: thy name is the divine Guru."

"From the Heavenly court a robe of honour was conferred upon Guru Nānak."

Then, says the *Purātan Janamasākhī*, the order was given to the ministers that they should take Guru Nānak back to the ferry. As he made his appearance on the third day, the citizens questioned one another in amazement: "He had fallen into the river. Whencesoever hath he come now?"

The first words Guru Nānak uttered upon reappearance were: "There is no Hindu, there is no Musalman." Guru Nānak thus rejected distinctions between man and man on the basis of religion or caste. He pointed the way for people to look beyond these barriers. Through this pronouncement, he was not refuting any religion or its followers. He was only saying that all men were creatures of God, and hence equal.

Before the Nawāb to whom complaints were made by the orthodox, the Guru recited the following *sabad*:

It is not easy to be called a Musalman:
If there were one let him be so known.
He should first take to his heart
　　the tenets of his faith,
And purge himself of all pride.
He will be a Muslim who pursues the path
　　indicated by the founder of the creed,
Who extinguishes anxiety about life and death,
Who accepts the Will of God as supreme,
Who has faith in the Creator,

And surrenders himself to Him.
Only when he has established his goodwill for all,
O Nānak,
Will he be called a Musalman.

The *Purātan Janamasākhī* records: "When the Guru had uttered this *sabad*, the sons of Shaikhs, the Muftī, the Nawāb, the chiefs and the leaders were all amazed. The Nawāb said, 'Qāzī, Nānak hath arrived at the truth. Any further questioning will be futile.' All the people, Hindus and Musalmans, began to say to the Nawāb that God Himself spoke on Nānak's lips."

Guru Nānak was now ready to go forth into the wider world with the message he had to impart. He uttered a hymn of gratefulness. "An humble bard was I without occupation," he sang. "Praise be to the Lord that He hath called me to work." Dressed in a composite garb which belonged to none of the prevalent orders and which indeed was symbolic of his common message for all, and accompanied by the Muslim associate, Mardānā, Guru Nānak set out on his travels which took him to all four corners of India and beyond. The travels occupied him for twenty-four years. In the course of these tours, he visited places of pilgrimage sacred to Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists. He shared the hospitality of humble homes and rested sometimes under bare skies. He went to small unknown villages and he visited the seats of the mighty. He mixed with simple, unlettered men, and he discoursed with the learned. He attended fairs and festivals, temples and mosques, hermitaries and *khānaqāhs*. He spoke with individuals engaged in their daily trades and he preached to multitudes conveniently reached at ancient centres of pilgrimage. Many found peace in his gentle words of love and faith and were won over to his teaching.

The Janamasākhīs present these journeys in a series of stories, parables and miracles. Early in his travels, for instance, Guru Nānak arrived at Eminābād, an ancient town in west Punjab. Here he stayed with Lālo, a carpenter, declining the invitation of a wealthy noble, Malik Bhāgo. As the latter chided him for eating with a lowly carpenter, the Guru sent for food from his kitchen as well as from Lālo's home.. In the words of the *Bālā Janamasākhī*, "Guru Nānak took Lālo's coarse

bread in his right hand and Malik Bhāgo's delicacies in the left. As he pressed both, milk dropped from Lālo's coarse bread, and blood from Malik Bhāgo's delicacies. The entire assembly was lost in amazement."

On the highway, outside Talumbā, in southwest Punjab, lived one Shaikh Sajjan in apparent piety and prosperity. He maintained a mosque as well as a temple for use by Muslim and Hindu travellers and seemed to welcome anyone for a night's lodging and meal. Many a wayfarer felt relieved and grateful when, at the end of a day's journey, he was led into such an hospitable home. The sleeping guests were Sajjan's victims and their goods his property. After despatching the traveller with the help of his band of thugs, he would appear in the morning with his pilgrim's staff and rosary and spread out a carpet to pray.

On Guru Nānak's lustrous face, the far-seeing Sajjan read signs of affluence. The guest was therefore all the more welcome and entitled to more than usual courtesy. But at night the Guru tarried long before going to bed. Sajjan who had been waiting got impatient. At last, he came near the door to see inside the room. Mardānā was playing on the rebeck and Guru Nānak was singing a hymn in enraptured devotion. The sight held Sajjan. The sweet music calmed the agitation in his heart. He fell at the Guru's feet and owned remorsefully how sinful he was. The Guru assured him that he could yet hope for God's grace and forgiveness if he confessed and repented. Sajjan confessed his sins and prayed the Guru for pardon. One condition was laid upon him: he must give away all of his possessions which he had collected by impious means. This Sajjan promised to do. He converted his house into a *dharamsālā* or place of worship and charity, and became a zealous disseminator of Guru Nānak's word.

At Hardwār, ancient place of Hindu pilgrimage on the Gangā, Guru Nānak stood with the pilgrims on the spot where the waters of the river were considered to be the holiest. As they dipped themselves in the river to perform their ablutions, the pilgrims prayed and tossed water in palmsful towards the rising sun in the east. The Guru took to throwing water to the west. The people were surprised to see this and wondered how anybody could act in such a sacrilegious manner. Some

thought he was crazed in the mind; others that he must be a Turk. Soon a crowd gathered round him and began to question him, "Are you a Hindu or a Musalman? Why do you throw water to the west? Whom will it avail?"

"Whom will your water benefit?" Guru Nānak asked in return.

They told him that they were offering oblations to the spirits of their dead ancestors. This was for their satisfaction. At this the Guru continued his procedure with even greater earnestness. The pilgrims became puzzled. "What do you mean by offering water to the west?" they asked him again. "This is for my farm near Lahore which needs watering," said the Guru. The listeners felt amused and asked him how anyone could send water so many miles away.

"How far must our ancestors be from here?" asked the Guru. "My water has but to cross Sirhind, and then Lahore is barely a stone's throw from there."

The people realized this was no common man and were willing to listen to him.

In Pākpattan, Guru Nānak met Shaikh Ibrāhim, twelfth in descent from Shaikh Farīd, the famous Sufi mystic. The Janamasākhīs describe in a mixture of poetic metaphor and philosophy the discourse which took place between them.

On seeing Guru Nānak in the ordinary attire of a householder, Shaikh Ibrāhim remarked:

> Covet either the world,
> Or covet Allah, the Creator!
> Set not thy feet on two boats
> Lest thou drownest all thy goods.

The Guru answered:

> Set thy feet on both boats;
> In both ship thy goods.
> A boat will sink, a boat will go across;
> For those who deal in true,
> everlasting goods,
> There is no ocean, no drowning, no loss.

He told the Shaikh that, to gain the Divine, one need not disown the world. In discovering harmony between the two lay the way to attainment. The body would perish, but the

other boat, the soul, could be saved by living in the world in the spirit of a true seeker.

On return from his second *udāsī*, a word commonly used for his preaching odysseys, Guru Nānak visited Multan. In this ancient town which had witnessed through the centuries history's most violent vicissitudes, there lived at that time many Sufi faqīrs. It also contained shrines and tombs of several eminent saints such as Shaikh Muhammad Yūsuf Gardezī (d. 1114) and Shaikh Bahā-ud-Dīn Zakarīā (d. 1262) and their descendants and successors. When they learnt of the Guru's arrival, the *pīrs* of Multan, says Bhāī Gurdās (1551-1636), came out and met him with a bowl overflowing to the brim with milk. This gesture of theirs symbolized that the place was already full of religious teachers. The Guru laid upon the bowl a jasmine petal, indicating that he would still find room for himself without unsettling the others. And the Guru, says Bhāī Gurdās, mingled with the holy men as do the waters of the Gangā and the sea.

How Guru Nānak anticipated the future development of the Sikh faith is apparent from his reaction to Bābar's invasion of India. His heart was deeply pained and he described the sorrows of Indians—Hindus and Muslims alike—in words of intense power and suffering. The event was read in terms of history's judgement upon a corrupt and tyrannical rule typified by the Lodī monarchy. But the foreigner was not forgiven. In fact, Indian literature of that period records no more virile protest againt the invading hordes than do Guru Nānak's four poems of Bābar-*vānī* in the Guru Granth.

According to the *Purātan Janamasākhī*, Guru Nānak and Mardānā were captured during Bābar's attack on Saidpur. They fell into the hands of Mīr Khān, the Mughal, who ordered them to be taken to prison as slaves. The Guru was given a load to carry and Mardānā a horse to lead. But Mīr Khān, says the *Purātan Janamasākhī*, saw that the Guru's bundle was carried without any support and Mardānā's horse followed him without the reins. He reported this to Sultān Bābar and said, "Sovereign, a faqīr has been taken into custody whose loads carry themselves a cubit above his head. His servant walks playing the rebeck and worshipping God, with the horse

following behind him." The Sultān remarked, "If there was such a holy man here, the town should not have been destroyed."

In camp, outside the town, women were collected and made to grind corn. "The Pathan women," says the *Purātan Janamasākhī*, "and Kshatriya women and Brāhman women were seated together doing their forced chores. The Guru too was given a handmill, but his mill turned by itself." As the king came, the Guru uttered these verses:

They whose hair made them look fairer by far
    and who touched it lovingly with sacred vermilion,
Have had their heads shorn with scissors,
    and their throats choked with dust.
They who stirred not out of their private chambers
    are now denied shelter even by the roadside.

* * * *

When they were married,
    they looked so beautiful beside their bridegrooms.
They came seated in palanquins
    with ivory bangles asport their arms.
They were awaited with pitchers full of water,
    and with fans arabesqued in glass.
Gifts of money were showered on them as they sat
    and gifts of money showered as they stood.
They were given coconut and dates to eat,
    and they joyed on the bridal bed.
Strings now fasten their necks,
    broken are their wreaths of pearls.

"Then," says the *Purātan Janamasākhī*, "Bābar kissed his feet. He said, 'On the face of this faqīr one sees God Himself.' Then all the people, Hindus and Musalmans, began to make their salutations. The king spoke again, 'O dervish, accept something.' The Guru answered, 'I take nothing, but you must release all the prisoners of Saidpur and restore their property to them.' King Bābar ordered, 'Those who are in detention be released and their property be returned to them.' All the prisoners of Saidpur were set at liberty."

At the end of his *udāsīs*, Guru Nānak settled down at Kartārpur. This was a village he had himself founded on the right bank of the River Rāvī. He laid aside the pilgrim's clothes and adopted home-dress. By this he meant to say that religion did not depend upon external forms. He was,

simultaneously, saying that true religion could be practised only in a life lived in the world.

A community of disciples grew up at Kartārpur. It was not a monastic order in any manner, but a fellowship of ordinary men engaged in the ordinary occupations of life. Their sole support was the Lord's word as spoken by Guru Nānak. They came to Kartārpur and then returned to their homes filled with a new fervour.

An institution of far-reaching importance was the *langar*. The *langar*, or community kitchen, meant brotherhood, equality and humbleness. It annulled caste, especially. A key element in this process of restructuring of religious and social life was the spirit of *sevā* or self-giving service. Corporal works of charity and mutual help were undertaken voluntarily and zealously and considered a peculiarly pious duty. For the *langar*, the disciples engaged themselves in one task or another. Some drew water from the well, some reaped corn and some went out to the forest to bring firewood. Some cooked food in the kitchen, some cleaned utensils and some waved the fan over the assembly to soften the rigour of a hot summer's day. The common food was eaten by all, sitting in rows together as equals without any considerations of caste or rank. Guru Nānak tilled his own land to provide for himself and his family.

The Guru was now advanced in years and wished to appoint a successor to continue his teaching. The choice fell upon Lahinā, the humblest of his disciples. He laid five copper coins and a coconut before him and bowed down at his feet. Lahinā, the faithful disciple, became the Guru. He became Nānak himself. As says Bhāī Gurdās, "Guru Nānak imparted his light to Lahinā so changing his form." Before installing him Guru, Guru Nānak had called Lahinā *Angad*, i.e. a limb of his own body. Guru Angad became the second Guru of the Sikhs.

On September 7, 1539, Guru Nānak departed this life. He left behind a devoted community of disciples and a revelation open to all—high and low. He had also appointed a successor-Guru to carry on his work.

The *Purātan Janamasākhī* describes the last moments of Guru Nānak's life in this manner: "The Musalmans began to say, 'We shall bury him.' The Hindus said, 'We shall cremate him.'

The Guru spoke, 'Put ye flowers on both sides, those of the Hindus on the right and those of the Musalmans on the left. They whose flowers remain fresh will have the choice'....[After his death] as the sheet was lifted from above the body, there was nothing but the flowers. The flowers of both the Hindus and the Musalmans remained fresh. The Hindus took theirs and the Musalmans theirs. The *sangat* fell on their knees."

TEACHINGS OF GURU NĀNAK

I (ikk) oankār • satināmu kartā purakhu nirbhau nirvairu akāl mūrati ajūnī saibhaṅ gurprasādi

This is how Guru Nānak's *Japujī* begins. The Guru Granth opens with these words. The *Japujī* is the Sikhs' morning prayer. These opening lines of the *Japujī* are called Mūl Mantra or the root formula. It is the basis of Guru Nānak's teaching. In a free English rendering, the Mūl Mantra would mean: 1 (One) Absolute Being. The figure '1' proclaims His existence as well as His unicity. His name? Call Him *sat*, for He *is*. He is truth eternal. He is the creator of all things. Yet He does not remain apart from His creation. He is the pervasive Person. Since He is the creator of everything, He is without fear. He is without rancour. He is not limited by time. Yet He is the one form that exists. He is not subject to birth and decay. He is perennially self-existent. He can be realized only through the grace of the Guru.

This is the essence of Guru Nānak's revelation of the character of God. This statement about the Divine is the foundation of the Sikh faith. On this view of the Absolute is based the doctrine of Guru Nānak. Belief in One God is the first principle. God is eternal, infinite and all-pervasive—the ultimate ground of all that exists. He is the creator of all men and of all things. He is the source of grace and love. To love Him and become worthy of His grace should be the aim of all men. In sublime Punjabi poetry, Guru Nānak has sung praises of God as defined in the Mūl Mantra. All of his hymns are preserved in the Guru Granth. From these, men have come to know God more fully.

Guru Nānak teaches the oneness of God. He calls God simply *ikk* (One) without a second. Yet God is not abstract or

impersonal. He has personal attributes. He is Himself conscious and the source of all consciousness. "There is light in all and that light is He. Through this light everything is illuminated." In this sense, Guru Nānak's teaching was monotheistic, not monistic. God is One, but what He has created has reality. He responds to the devotion of the humblest being. God is both *nirguna* and *saguna*, i.e. He is without attributes as well as with attributes. Yet He is formless. He is never incarnated, nor can any image contain Him. God pervades His entire creation. But He is not limited to it. Nor is He identical with it.

The unity of God implies the equality of men. Guru Nānak overruled divisions among men on the grounds of birth, caste or country. To make distinctions among them was sinful. "All men are God's own creation," said Guru Nānak. "False is caste and false are worldly titles. One Supreme Lord sustains all." "Know men by their worth. Do not ask their caste. There is no caste in the next world." "Neither caste nor birth will be enquired . . . . As you act so will your caste and your status be." Guru Nānak also said that women were not to be treated as inferior. Among his followers, they were given full equality with men.

The entire creation depends on *hukm*, i.e. God's Will. This *hukm* is the principle of all life. This creation is the outcome of the Will of the Conscious Being. He is the first cause. Guru Nānak makes no further attempt at surmising how and when this universe was created. "No one knows the hour or the day, the season or the month of its origin. Only the Creator who made the world knows when He made it . . . . And there are countless worlds and regions beyond the skies and below." In another *sabad*, Guru Nānak says, "For many, many ages complete darkness reigned everywhere. There were no worlds, nor the sun, nor the moon. The Will of the Lord alone reigned. This universe came into being when He willed to manifest Himself."

Hukm is the fundamental principle of God's activity; thus it is the principle of all activity. Guru Nānak often used the names of God found in the Hindu and Muslim traditions. But he always understood them as descriptive of *hukm*. Man's duty is to seek an understanding of the Divine *hukm* and to live his life wholly in accord with it. This is the way to break the wall

of falsehood. "Walk with *hukm* (the Divine Will) as your guide," says Guru Nānak.

The Divine Reality sustains this world. Along with this was recognized the permanence of the human soul. Man is more than the body. What gives the body consciousness is the spark of divinity in it. The individual soul is part of the Divine as the spark is part of the fire. It lasts even after the destruction of the body.

What are the causes of man's bondage? The primary one is his egoism (*haumai*). This is what separates man from the Primal Reality and dims the divine spark within him. This is what hampers human understanding. Egoism or self-concern creates a wall around the individual and separates him from his original source. This is what leads to spiritual blindness or nescience (*agiān, ajnāna*). One becomes alienated from the Universal Will and mistakes what is unreal, the *samsāra*, for the real. One is ruled by one's passions and instincts and cannot break loose from the stranglehold of the five evils, i.e. *kāma* (sensuality), *krodha* (anger), *lobha* (avarice), *moha* (attachment), and *ahankāra* (pride). Egoity runs counter to divinity. The ego-ridden person is the *manmukh*, unregenerate man, self-centred and self-willed, who is led by his wayward mind. *Haumai* is the cause of all suffering. By overcoming *haumai* is the truth realized. This is the way to achieve union with the Eternal One. Attainment of union with the Eternal One is the ultimate purpose of man. This, according to Guru Nānak, is *mukti*, final release or liberation. Thus is the cycle of death and rebirth ended.

How can *haumai*, the finite ego or self-love, be overcome? Guru Nānak has prescribed no austerities or penances. He in fact rejected all outward forms of piety. He said that pilgrimages, fasts and ascetic practices were of no avail. The first step towards enlightenment is the awakening that the Transcendent is the only ultimate truth. This awakening must be accompanied by an intense love of God, utter self-surrender to Him and complete faith in his *hukm* or Will. Thus one realizes the reality and frees oneself from the bondage of ego.

Hukm is not arbitrary. It works according to its own fixed laws. There is also room in it for *nadar*. *Nadar* is the Eternal One's grace. By God's grace man finally realizes the truth and

liberates himself. Grace is manifested through God's word—through the Guru. Through God's grace one reaches the goal. This divine favour is the final arbiter. Without it no spiritual advantage can accrue.

Guru Nānak taught that devotion was more important than religious practices. Devout love was set forth as the truest virtue—the fundamental disposition for one seeking liberation. By immersing oneself in *nām*, i.e. by constant remembrance of the Divine Name, one attained *moksha* or *mukti*. This was freedom from *haumai*, from self-bondage, from the circuit of birth, death and rebirth. Life in this world is conditioned. Temporality is an essential trait of human existence. One could go beyond this contingent state, could transcend *samsāra*—the sphere of temporality, the finite world of repeated becoming—by concentrating on *nām*. By devotion and absorption in *nām*, one gains control of the mind and evolves a one-pointed awareness of the Absolute Being. Nām-simran (*smarana*) is the highest spiritual value. It is the discipline of concentrating on the Divine Personality. It is the loving remembrance of His Name, the practice of Sati Nām. In this sacred calling lies man's real worth. Man's greatness (*vadiāī*), his honour (*pat*), his destiny (*gati*) and his wealth of gems (*ratandhan*) all proceed from and reach their climax in his love of and friendship with God. All moral and spiritual virtues spring from this sovereign act of devotion to God.

Religious practices become efficacious only when *nām*, pervades them. Without *nām*, one is dominated by *haumai*. Through the practice of *nām*, one becomes aware of God's presence and gets into harmony with His Will. Thus one ascends to higher levels of consciousness. This discipline is born of meditation on the Divine Name. The Divine Name is indicated by the Guru. This meditation is no mere mystical recitation. It is the active realization of *nām* as the motivating force in all of God's creation. When one is attuned to *nām*, one's life is changed. One becomes absorbed in God. Thus does man realize his real nature and merges back into the Light. This potentiality which men possess to become God-like gives meaning and dignity to human existence.

The Guru is a vital link in man's spiritual progress. He is the teacher who shows the way. He is not an intercessor, but

exemplar and guide. He is no *avatār* or God's incarnation. Through him God instructs his creatures. The Guru is the perfectly realized soul. At the same time he is capable of leading the believer to the highest state of spiritual realization. The Guru has been called the ladder, the raft, the rowboat by means of which one reaches God. He is the revealer of God's word. Through him the word or *sabad* enters human history. The Guru is the voice of God. He is the divine self-expression. Man turns to the Guru for instruction because of his wisdom and his moral piety. He indicates the path to liberation. It is the Guru who brings the love and nature of God to the believer. It is he who brings that grace of God by which *haumai* is mastered. The Guru is witness to God's love of His creation. He is God's *hukm* made concrete.

In the Sikh tradition, a special figure is used to describe the transfer of the Guruship. This figure helps us to understand the true nature of the Guru. The Guruship passes from one Guru to the other as one candle lights another. Thus the real Guru is God, for He is the source of all light. It is clear that we are not to confuse the Guru with the human form (the unlit candle). In the Sikh faith, which originated in Guru Nānak's teaching, ten Gurus held the office. The last of the Gurus passed it on to the Sacred Book, the Guru Granth. The Guru is so central to the Sikh way of life that the tradition itself has been called the path of discipleship.

Guru Nānak says that man will continue in the cycle of birth and death according to his actions. This is the theory of *karma* or deeds. The tendencies a being acquires in a particular life as a result of his actions will determine his subsequent birth and conduct. Yet no one is eternally condemned. Man still has the use of his free will. The cycle of birth and death can be broken by putting faith in the Guru and following his instruction. There is always time for man to save himself.

Although the body is subject to destruction, it is not to be disregarded. It is the shrine of the indwelling spirit. Guru Nānak said, "The body is the palace, the temple, the house of God. Into it He hath put His light eternal." The body is to be used as an instrument of spiritual gain and service to mankind. Human life gives an individual the opportunity to do good to others. A religious man should not withdraw himself

from the world. "He should," says Guru Nānak, "battle in the open field. His mind should be perfectly in control and his heart filled with love."

The man of Guru Nānak is the creation of God and he partakes of His Own Light. Since man is of Divine lineage, he essentially is good, not evil. Evil, according to Sikhism, is not something inbuilt in the human situation. It arises out of man's ignorance of his Divine origin, out of his *haumai*. In this world which in Sikhism is posited as a reality being "the True One's Own mansion," man launches upon the rediscovery of his true self. This invests his sojourn in the world with authenticity and reality. That is why Sikh faith admits man's material happiness to be as important as his spiritual liberation. Man's secular and mundane concerns are not rejected, but are sought to be related to a higher spiritual and moral goal. The persistent opposition in Guru Nānak's thought to oppressive state structures and to empty ritualism is derived directly from the recognition of their anti-human character.

Guru Nānak attaches the greatest importance to moral conduct. His *Japujī* is full of ethical teachings. Devout Sikhs recall these teachings daily as they recite their morning prayer. Perseverance, chastity, wisdom, self-control, patience and obedience to the Will of God are virtues prized most. Practical virtue was thus made an essential ingredient of piety. Orthopraxy (right-doing) was considered as important as orthodoxy (right-thinking). Guru Nānak says, "Truth is higher than everything else, but higher by far is the living of truth."

Guru Nānak laid special emphasis on *sevā*, or self-abnegating deeds of service. By humble and devoted service one purified one's body and mind. This was the way of a truly religious man. He must live in the world and be an active agent in promoting the welfare of the community. He should have goodwill towards all and he should be ready to render service to others. *Kirat karnī wand chhaknā te nām japnā* is the duty of every true disciple. He must earn his living by his own labour, share with others the fruit of his exertion and practise the discipline of *nām* (absorption in God's remembrance). This is the essence of Guru Nānak's teaching.

Guru Nānak was a teacher not of his own wisdom. He preached what, he said, had been taught by the Lord Himself.

In his *bānī* or inspired word, he spoke as a witness to revelation. He had seen or heard something of God to which he called the attention of men. In one of his verses, he said, "As the Lord sends the word so do I deliver it." Again, "I speak only what Thou made me to speak." Thus Guru Nānak found himself to be performing a duty divinely laid upon him.

CHAPTER III

CONSOLIDATION

Guru Angad was the second of the ten Gurus. He was chosen by Guru Nānak from amongst his disciples to carry on his teaching. He became worthy of this dignity by completely abandoning himself to the will of the Guru. By humility and obedience, he attained perfect spiritual discernment. Guru Nānak bypassed his own sons in his favour. He made him more than his successor. He made him equal with himself and transferred to him his own light. Angad became Nānak, Nānak II. As Bhāī Gurdās, not long afterwards, wrote:

> Angad got the same *tilak* (mark on the forehead),
> the same umbrella over his head,
> And he was seated on the same throne
> As belonged to Guru Nānak.
> The seal from Guru Nānak's hand came
> into Guru Angad's,
> And thus was his sovereignty proclaimed.

This process was repeated successively until the installation of the Tenth Guru, Gobind Singh. Light passed from one body to another, like one flame kindling another. Sikhism thus owns ten Gurus. As the Sikhs believe, all the ten Gurus were one in spirit, though different in body. They were of the same light and they revealed, in continuum, the same truth. Their teaching was the same. To this day they are revered equally by the faithful. This phenomenon of the ten Gurus or teachers of equal spiritual rank and sharing the same revelation is peculiar to Sikhism.

In the Sikh system, the word *Guru* is used only for the ten spiritual prophets—Guru Nānak to Guru Gobind Singh, and for none other. Now this office of Guru is fulfilled by the Guru Granth, the Sacred Book, which was so apotheosized by the last Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, before he passed away in

1708. No living person, however holy or revered, can have the title or status of Guru. For Sikhs, Guru is the holy teacher, the prophet under direct commission from God—the Ten who have been and the Guru Granth which is their continuing visible manifestation.

Guru Angad was born Lahinā on March 31, 1504, at Matte-dī-Sarāi. This village, now known as Sarāi Nāgā, is sixteen kilometres from Muktsar, in Farīdkot district of the Punjab. Lahinā's father, Bhāī Pherū, was a trader of humble means. For a while, he migrated to the village of Harīke, on the right bank of the Sutlej, in hope of a better living. However, the family had to leave Matte-dī-Sarāi for good when the village was plundered during one of Bābar's invasions.

Lahinā settled at Khadūr which is near Tarn Tāran, now in Amritsar district. He was married and had three children. Bībī Amaro was the daughter and Dāsū and Dātū his two sons.

Lahinā was a devout worshipper of the goddess Durgā. Every year he led a batch of devotees from his village to the temple of Jawālāmukhī, in the lower Himalayas. There lived at Khadūr a Sikh, Jodhā by name, who uttered from his lips always the word *Guru*. One day Lahinā heard him sing the hymns of Guru Nānak, and was deeply moved. On his next annual pilgrimage to the goddess's temple, he broke journey at Kartārpur to see the Guru. This was the end of all his quest and journeying. He wished to travel no more, nor to leave the presence of the Guru. His companions were angry with him, but he cheerfully bore their reprimand and refused to resume the journey.

"What is thy name?" asked the Guru as he returned after finally taking leave of his companions.

"Lahinā," he answered.

"Thy debt was here. So God hath brought thee hither," spoke the Guru.

The word *lahinā*, in Punjabi, means to receive or, as a noun, the debt owed to a creditor. And, from the Guru, Lahinā received what he alone was destined to receive.

Lahinā was twenty-eight when he came to Kartārpur. With his whole heart, he devoted himself to the Guru's word and to deeds of service. He cleaned the utensils and swung the fan. He was humble and devout by nature, and remained constant

to the modest duty he had undertaken from the first day. As his heart was purified by pious labour, so was his understanding illumined. He had rapidly grown in the spirit of holy Kartārpur and fully grasped the Guru's teaching. He was admired for his piety and came to be regarded among the chosen disciples. Yet he preferred always to stand in the ranks performing his many humble tasks. According to the *Meharbān Janamasākhī*, "Living in the presence of the Guru, he attained peace. Thus did he reach his goal. The Guru showered his favour upon him. As Guru Bābā Nānak was, even so Lahinā became. As was the Guru, so was the disciple."

Once at the end of a day's work in the fields, bundles of grass had to be carried home. Guru Nānak's sons avoided the task. But Lahinā immediately took the load on his head. As he walked, mud dripped from the wet grass and besmirched his clothes. The Guru's wife felt sorry to see Lahinā's dress so soiled. She said to the Guru, "Why is one born of a good family given such a sludgy load to carry upon his head, Lord?" Guru Nānak spoke gently, "This is not a load of grass, but the wreath of sovereignty."

Many were Lahinā's acts of pious service and many also were Guru Nānak's favourable prophecies.

One winter night, it rained heavily and a sidewall of the *dharamsālā* collapsed. The Guru desired that the wall be repaired immediately. His sons said that they would send for masons in the morning and have the damaged side restored. But the Guru insisted that they put the work in hand at once. So they started repairing the wall. The Guru then told them that the portion they had built needed to be reconstructed and asked them to demolish it. They tore down what they had built. But when they were asked to start afresh, they protested saying that they must have some sleep. The Guru thereupon spoke to Lahinā, who set to work immediately. "For days and nights," says the *Manī Singh Janamasākhī*, "he went on alternately raising the masonry and pulling it down at the Guru's command." Lakhmīdās, the Guru's son, chided Lahinā with madness. Lahinā replied that a servant's hands were only made pure by doing the Master's bidding.

Guru Nānak had not much longer to live. He laid five

copper coins before Lahinā and bowed down at his feet. Lahinā, the faithful disciple, was thus installed Guru, with the new name of Angad. At Guru Nānak's bidding, Guru Angad retired to his village of Khadūr and assumed the teaching office. He rose early in the morning, three hours before daybreak and sat in meditation. Then the musicians sang Guru Nānak's *Āsā-kī-Vār*. Afterwards, Guru Angad attended to sick persons. Such persons, particularly lepers, came from all parts to be healed by the Guru. Later, he preached and expounded Guru Nānak's hymns. At mealtime, all sat together without distinctions of caste or creed to eat from the community kitchen. The Guru's wife looked after the *langar*. The Guru and his family ate a simple meal which he earned by twisting *munj*, reed-bark, into string.

The afternoon was for the children's instruction. Guru Angad himself taught them Gurmukhī letters. Another afternoon pastime was witnessing wrestling bouts or watching the children at play. In the evening, the famous musician, Balwand, sang the sacred hymns. The *Sodar* was then recited and food eaten in Guru-kā-Langar as in the morning. Thus Khadūr became the new centre of the Sikh faith, as Kartārpur had been in Guru Nānak's time. Sikhs came from far and near to seek instruction and renew their faith. Many more joined the fellowship.

Guru Angad was an inspired poet. His compositions, in chaste Punjabi, are preserved in the Guru Granth. According to the *Purātan Janamasākhī*, Guru Nānak had handed to Guru Angad the book containing his hymns. Guru Angad held the volume in high reverence. He explained to the *sangats* Guru Nānak's hymns and instructed them in the Sikh discipline. As says the *Mahimā Prakāsh*, the Sikhs descried in him the very picture of Guru Nānak.

To quote the *Mahimā Prakāsh* again, "Guru Angad one day spoke to Bhāī Buddhā in this manner: 'Seek the disciple who accompanied the Master, Guru Nānak, on his journeys far and near, who heard his preaching and reflected on it, and who witnessed the many strange events that occurred. Secure from him all the circumstances and have transcribed a volume which may please the hearts of those who should apply themselves to it.' Bālā Sandhū suddenly made his appearance.

He had peregrinated widely with the beloved Master. He bowed his forehead at Guru Angad's feet and said, 'This moment is blessed for me, O Lord. The Perfect One had declared that I would never be denied the privilege of a sight of him. But since his passing away, I have remained in bewilderment, without seeing him.... In your presence now I have realized that there is no difference between thee and the Master.' Guru Angad thereupon said, 'As Guru Nānak roamed abroad and as he conversed with holy men, you were in attendance. Those auspicious events and *sabads* you must now get recorded.' Bālā felt happy to hear those words. The Guru's praise burst forth from his lips like clouds opening in the skies."

The *sākhīs* and *sabads* were recorded in Gurmukhī characters in the presence of Guru Angad. This, as the tradition goes, was the origin of what has been current as the *Bālā Janamasākhī*. In any case, Guru Angad popularized Gurmukhī letters which gave Punjabi its script. This marked the beginning of written literature in the language.

Guru Amar Dās, who inherited Guru Angad's light, was his senior in age by twenty-five years. But he proved to be a true disciple. He had come as a seeker and remained to become the bestower of the highest blessing. He was born on May 5, 1479, a bare ten years after Guru Nānak. His parents, Tej Bhān and Bakht Kaur, lived in the village of Bāsarke, near the present-day city of Amritsar. They were Kshatriyas of the Bhallā caste and were staunch in their Vaishnava faith. Amar Dās shared the family's religious zeal and, year after year, made pilgrimage to Hardwār to bathe in the sacred waters. This he did without fail until, as he was once returning from his holy duty, he was reproached by a *sādhū* for not owning a Guru. Without a Guru or enlightener, all his exertions, he was told, must remain abortive. Since that day Amar Dās had been in search of such a teacher.

One day enchanting notes of sacred Punjabi verse fell on his ears. This was Bībī Amaro, Guru Angad's daughter married to Amar Dās' nephew, reciting the hymns of Guru Nānak. Amar Dās became inquisitive. He desired to see the Guru who sat in Guru Nānak's place and travelled with Bībī Amaro to Khadūr. Beholding Guru Angad,

he at once knew that he had found what he had been in search of.

For Amar Dās this was the beginning of a new life. He was old, yet he took to the teaching of the Guru with vigorous zeal. He performed his daily devotions and derived special joy from rendering service to the Guru. He brought water from the river every morning for his bath. He served food in the *langar* and fetched firewood from the forest. After a day filled with such deeds of service, he would retire to the village of Goindwāl. Here he had at the Guru's bidding started living with his family of wife and two sons and two daughters. Going away from Khadūr, he always walked backwards so that his face was not turned away from where the Guru was. Amar Dās' life was an example of humility and devotion. Guru Angad acknowledged the perfection he had achieved by proclaiming him the future Guru. "Through deeds of devoted service, he [Guru Amar Dās] attained to Guruship," says the *Bansāvalīnāmā*.

Amar Dās entered upon the office of Guru at Guru Angad's death in 1552. In his hands the Sikh faith was further consolidated. He created a well-knit ecclesiastical system and set up twenty-two *manjīs* (dioceses or preaching-districts), covering different parts of India. Each was placed under the charge of a pious Sikh, who, besides preaching Guru Nānak's word, looked after the *sangat* within his jurisdiction and transmitted the disciples' offerings to Goindwāl. Guru Amar Dās appointed the opening days of the months of Baisākh and Māgh as well as the Divālī for the Sikhs to forgather at Goindwāl. He laid down for them simple ceremonies and rites for birth, marriage and death. In this way, the Sikh faith began developing the signs of a well-marked social group.

In the Sikh Scripture compiled by the Fifth Guru, there is scarcely a *sabad* alluding to any historical event. The whole volume consists of poetry of a purely spiritual temper. Yet there is a hymn by the Fourth Guru which contains a reference to Guru Amar Dās' visit to some of the sacred places. As the *Mahimā Prakāsh* says, "The Guru went to all the places of pilgrimage and made them holy. He conferred favour on his Sikhs by letting them have a sight of him. He planted the seed of God's love in their hearts. He spread light in the world and

ejected darkness." Liberation of the people was also cited by Guru Rām Dās, Nānak IV, as the purpose of the pilgrimage undertaken by his predecessor. According to his *sabad*, Guru Amar Dās visited Kurukshetra at the time of *abhijit nakshatra*. This, by astronomical calculations made by a modern scholar, fell on January 14, 1553. This is one date authentically abstracted from the Guru Granth and one of the fewest so precisely known about the life of Guru Amar Dās.

The Guru-kā-Langar became still more renowned in Guru Amar Dās' time. The Guru expected every visitor to partake of food in it before seeing him. By this he meant to minimize the distinctions of caste and rank. Emperor Akbar, who once visited him at Goindwāl, had to eat out of the common kitchen like any other pilgrim. As the *Mahimā Prakāsh* records, the Emperor refused to step on the silks spread out for him by his servants when going to call on the Guru. He turned aside the lining with his own hands and walked to the Guru's presence barefoot.

The food in the *langar* was usually of a rich Punjabi variety. Guru Amar Dās himself, however, lived on coarse bread earned by his own labour. Whatever was received in the kitchen during the day was used by night and nothing was kept for the morrow.

Guru Amar Dās gave special attention to the amelioration of the position of women. The removal of the disadvantages to which they had been subject became an urgent concern. He assigned women to the responsibility of supervising the communities of disciples in certain sectors. The customs of *purdah* and *satī* were discouraged. The *Mahimā Prakāsh* relates the story of the visit of the Rājā of Harīpur. The Rājā and his wife were escorted to Goindwāl by the Guru's nephew, Sāwan Mall. Yet the Guru did not waive the prescription that the Rājā and the Rānī eat in the common *langar* before they could see him. A further direction was that the ladies must come dressed in white with their faces uncovered.

The *bānī*, the Gurus' revealed word, continued to be a precious endowment. Guru Amar Dās himself composed verse of vivid spiritual insight. He also collected the compositions of his predecessors and of some of the Bhaktas of that time. When he compiled these into two volumes—both preserved in

the descendant families to this day—an important step towards the codification of the canon had been taken.

One day, says the *Mahimā Prakāsh*, the disciples begged Guru Amar Dās to pronounce how a Sikh must conduct himself in his daily life. The Guru Compassionate made this answer: "He who firmly grasps the Guru's word is my beloved Sikh. He should rise a watch before dawn, make his ablutions and sit in seclusion. The Guru's image he should implant in his heart, and contemplate on *gurbānī*. He should keep his mind and consciousness firmly in control. He should never utter a falsehood, nor indulge in slander. He should make an honest living and be prepared always to serve holy men. He must not covet another's woman or wealth. He should not eat unless hungry, nor sleep unless tired. He who breaks this principle falls a victim to sloth. His span is shortened and he lives in suffering. My Sikh should shun those who feign as women to worship the Lord. He should seek instead the company of pious men. Thus will he shed his ignorance. Thus will he adhere to holy devotion."

On September 24, 1534, was born in a simple God-fearing Sodhī family at Lahore a boy who was named Rām Dās. He was also known as Jethā, a word which in Punjabi means the eldest or first-born. His father's name was Harī Dās and mother's Dayā Kaur.

As he grew up, Jethā was given boiled pulses to sell in the bazaar to eke out the family's meagre means. One day, he met a group of wandering *sādhūs* who were apparently hungry. He gave them the eatables his basket contained and went home. On another occasion, he fell in with a batch of Sikhs on their way to Goindwāl to see their Guru. As they marched, they chanted the sacred hymns. Jethā was moved to see the sight. He distributed the fare he had laid out to vend and joined the caravan of pilgrims.

At Goindwāl, he felt at home from the very first moment. His heart was filled with pious devotion as he saw Guru Amar Dās and bent at his feet. He decided to remain there ever after and take his instruction. The Guru was also pleased with his pious and intelligent manner. He lovingly spoke, "If thou hast come abandoning all worldly desires, sovereignty thou shalt secure."

Jethā proved a true and devoted disciple, and made rapid progress in the Sikh doctrine. His mastery of the sacred compositions of the Gurus was unmatched. Besides participating in prayer and hymn-singing, he daily engaged himself in humble deeds of *sevā*. Like all good Sikhs, he prized work in the *langar* above everything else. He served food to visiting pilgrims, scrubbed the dishes and brought from the forest a load of firewood on his head every day for the community kitchen. Whenever he had the time, he helped with digging the *bāolī*. This *bāolī*, a well with eighty-four steps descending to water level, then under construction at Goindwāl, was completed in 1556, and became an important point of pilgrim attraction. Everyone admired Jethā's devout and sincere spirit. Such was Guru Amar Dās' own trust in him that he married his daughter, Bībī Bhānī, to him.

Guru Amar Dās now desired to name a successor. Who would be more worthy of the holy responsibility than Jethā? From the day he had set foot in Goindwāl, he seemed marked out for the honour. He was fully enlightened in the teaching of the Gurus and he had lived the life of a true Sikh. With all his knowledge and wisdom, he was humble and obedient. All his joy consisted in complying with the will of the Guru. Countless were the examples of his dedication to the Guru and to the truth he preached.

Guru Amar Dās made several tests, and each time his confidence in Jethā was enhanced. He was convinced that, of all his disciples, Jethā had mastered the teaching of Guru Nānak most worthily. He judged him suitable for the position of Guru and consecrated him as such by his own hand. Jethā, as Guru Rām Dās, became the fourth Guru of the Sikhs. As the bards Sattā and Balwand sang, "He was Nānak, he was Lahinā, he was Amar Dās himself." So did the Sikhs acknowledge him after Guru Amar Dās who passed away on September 1, 1574.

Guru Rām Dās developed yet another seat of the Sikh faith which surpassed all previous ones in importance. He purchased, in 1577, from the farmers of the village of Tung, a site, forty kilometres northwest of Goindwāl, on which he raised a new habitation. The place came to be known as Rāmdāspur or Guru Chakk. Here he dug a tank called Amritsar—the Pool of

Immortality. Amritsar was the name transferred to the town itself and this is how it is known to this day.

To Amritsar came disciples from all parts to see the Guru and obtain instruction. They took part in the morning and evening devotions and eagerly listened to the doctrine of Guru Nānak being explained by Guru Rām Dās. Most of the time was spent in numerous acts of community service. Some worked in the *langar*, others built huts and houses, while some others applied themselves to the digging of the tank.

Soon Guru-kā-Chakk was throbbing with a new life. Merchants and artisans came from distant places to settle there. Trade flourished. Pilgrims arrived in ever larger numbers. The fame of the town, which lay in the heart of the Mājhā area, country between the Rāvī and the Beās rivers, spread far and wide. As subsequent history witnessed, Amritsar played a significant part in the development of Sikhism. Guru Rām Dās had created a town which was to become the religious capital of the Sikhs.

Another factor which helped in the consolidation of the Sikh faith was the appointment of *masands*. Guru Amar Dās had established *manjīs* or dioceses in different parts of the country to knit together the Sikh *sangats*. Guru Rām Dās appointed *masands* or pastors. They went from place to place within their districts preaching Sikhism and collecting offerings from the disciples. These they presented to the Guru every six months, on the occasions of Baisākhī and Divālī.

Once Guru Rām Dās was visited by Bābā Srī Chand (1494-1629), the elder son of Guru Nānak. He had renounced the world and founded the ascetic sect of the Udāsīs. It is not on record if he met Guru Angad or Guru Amar Dās, but he did come to call on Guru Rām Dās. He remarked in banter that he [the Guru] had grown a long beard. "Yes," replied the Guru, "I have grown a long beard so that I may wipe with it the feet of saintly men like you." Bābā Srī Chand was deeply touched by the Guru's humility. He was convinced that his father's legacy was in worthy hands.

Guru Rām Dās, who, like his predecessors, preached a religion of loving devotion and service to humanity, laid down this rule for his Sikhs:

Let him, who calls himself a Sikh
of the true Guru,
Rise early and meditate on God;
Let him exert himself in the morning
and bathe in the tank of nectar;
Let him repeat God's name
under the Guru's instruction;
Thus shall his sins and errors be erased.
Let him at sunrise sing the Guru's hymns;
Sitting or standing, he should meditate on God's Name.
The disciple, who at every breath, meditates on God,
Will please the Guru's heart.
He alone takes the Guru's instruction
Who is by the Lord's mercy so guided.
The slave Nānak seeks the dust of the feet of him
Who himself repeats God's Name,
And leads others to do so.

Under Guru Arjun, the Fifth Guru, Sikhism became more firmly established. Its religious and social ideals received telling affirmation in practice. It added to its orbit more concrete and permanent symbols and its administration became more cohesive. By encouraging agriculture and trade and by the introduction of a system of tithe-collection for the common use of the community, a stable economic base was secured. Guru Arjun gave Sikhism its Scripture, the Granth Sāhib, and its main place of worship, the Amritsar shrine. He taught, by example, humility and sacrifice. He was the first martyr of the Sikh faith. The work of the first four Gurus was preparatory. It assumed a more definitive form in the hands of Guru Arjun. Later Gurus substantiated the principles manifested in his life. Guru Arjun thus marked a central point in the evolution of the Sikh tradition.

Guru Arjun, born on April 15, 1563, was the youngest of the three sons of Guru Rām Dās. He was of a deeply religious temperament, and his father's favourite. This excited the jealousy of his elder brother, Prithī Chand. Once Guru Rām Dās had an invitation to attend at Lahore the wedding of a relation. The Guru, unable to go himself, wanted one of his sons to represent him at the ceremony. Prithī Chand excused himself on a false pretext. The second son, Mahādev, had little interest in worldly matters. Arjun, the youngest, willingly offered to do the Guru's bidding. He was sent to Lahore with

instructions to remain there and preach Guru Nānak's word until recalled.

Arjun stayed in Lahore waiting for word from his father to arrive. He had, in the meantime, established a Sikh *sangat* in the city. But he longed to go back to Amritsar and be with his father. He wrote, in verse, a letter which he sent through a special messenger. The letter was intercepted at Amritsar by his brother, Prithī Chand. Another letter met with a similar fate. The third one did reach Guru Rām Dās. As he made enquiries about the previous two letters, he discovered what Prithī Chand had done.

Arjun was sent for at once and was received warmly in Amritsar. Guru Rām Dās expressed his appreciation of his work at Lahore, and of the tone of the letters he had written. Arjun extemporized a fourth one, giving vent to his feelings of joy at seeing him again with his eyes. Guru Rām Dās was pleased with him, and knew that he was the fittest person to inherit the office of Guru. He named him his successor before he passed away on September 1, 1581.

The first task Guru Arjun undertook was the completion of the Amritsar pool. Sikhs came from distant places to join in the work of digging. The Guru also started extending the town. On October 15, 1588, he laid out a temple in the middle of the tank. According to Giānī Giān Singh (*Tawārīkh Guru Khālsā*, Urdu, vol. I, 1896, p. 96), the Guru invited many holy men on this occasion. From among them, Miān Mīr (1550-1635), the famous Muslim Sufi, was asked to lay the first brick.

From Amritsar, Guru Arjun proceeded on a journey through the Mājhā territory. Coming upon the site of the present shrine of Tarn Tāran, twenty-four kilometres south of Amritsar, he felt much attracted by the beauty of its natural surroundings. He obtained the land from the villagers and constructed a tank which is now one of the sacred places of Sikh pilgrimage. As he moved from village to village, he helped the people sink wells and undertake several other works of public weal, especially to alleviate the hardship caused by famine which then gripped the Punjab. The city of Lahore, present-day capital of Pakistan Punjab, even now has a *bāolī* built by Guru Arjun. Clearly, the Guru's concern—

and leadership—extended to social and economic spheres as well. The Sikhs had coined a special title for him—Sachchā Pādshāh, i.e. the True King, as distinguished from the secular monarch. Another town raised by Guru Arjun was Kartārpur, in the Jullundur Doāb, between the rivers Beās and Sutlej.

Many more people were drawn into the Sikh fold in consequence of Guru Arjun's travels through the country. This growing following was kept united by an efficient cadre of local leaders, called *masands*. These pious Sikhs looked after the *sangats* in far-flung parts of the country. They collected from the disciples *dasvandh*, or one-tenth of their income which they were enjoined to give away for communal sharing, and they led the Sikhs to the Guru's presence periodically.

On returning to Amritsar, Guru Arjun prepared to codify the compositions of the Gurus into an authorized volume. According to the *Mahimā Prakāsh*, he set to work with the announcement: "As the Panth (community) has been revealed unto the world, so must there be the Granth (Book), too." The *bānī*, Gurus' inspired utterance, had always been the object of highest reverence for the Sikhs as well as for the Gurus themselves. It was equated with the Guru himself: "The *bānī* is the Guru and the Guru *bānī*." By accumulating the canon, Guru Arjun wished to affix the seal on the sacred word and preserve it for posterity. It was also to be the perennial fountain of inspiration and the means of self-perpetuation for the community.

Guru Arjun called Bhāī Gurdās to his presence and expressed to him the wish that the compositions of the Gurus and of some of the saints and Sufis be collected. Messages were sent to the Sikhs to gather and transmit to him the hymns of his predecessors.

Bābā Mohan, the son of Guru Amar Dās, had two manuscript collections of the Gurus' hymns inherited from his father. Bhāī Gurdās travelled to Goindwāl to bring these *pothīs*, but the owner refused to see him. Bhāī Buddhā (1506-1631) was similarly turned away from his door. Then Guru Arjun went himself. He sat in the street below Bābā Mohan's attic serenading him on his *tambūrā*. He was disarmed to hear the hymn, came downstairs with the *pothīs* and presented these to the Guru. As says the *Gurbilās Chhevīn Pātshāhī*, the *pothīs* were placed

on a palanquin bedecked with precious stones. The Sikhs carried it on their shoulders and Guru Arjun walked behind barefoot. He refused to ride his horse, saying that the *pothīs* were the very spirit of the four Gurus—his predecessors.

The cavalcade broke journey at Khadūr Sāhib to make obeisance at shrines sacred to Guru Angad. On the outskrits of Amritsar, it was received by Hargobind, Guru Arjun's young son, accompanied by a large number of Sikhs. He bowed at his father's feet and showered petals in front of the *pothīs*. Guru Arjun, Hargobind, Bhāī Gurdās and Bhāī Buddhā now bore the palanquin on their shoulders, led by musicians with flutes and drums. Reaching Amritsar, Guru Arjun first went to Harimandir to offer *karāhprasād*, the Sikh sacrament.

To quote from the *Gurbilās* again, an attractive spot in the thick of a forest next to Amritsar was marked out by Guru Arjun. So dense was the foliage that not even a moonbeam could pry into it. It was like Panchbatī itself, peaceful and picturesque. A tent was hoisted in this idyllic setting. Here Guru Arjun and Bhāī Gurdās set to working on the sacred volume.

The making of the Granth was no easy task. It involved sustained labour and a rigorous intellectual discipline. Selections had to be made from a vast mass of material. Besides the compositions of the four preceding Gurus and of Guru Arjun who himself was a poet with a rare intuition, there were songs and hymns by saints and Sufis. What was genuine had to be sifted from what was counterfeit. Then the selected material had to be assigned to appropriate musical measures, edited and recast where necessary, and transcribed in a minutely laid out order.

Guru Arjun accomplished the task with extraordinary exactness. He arranged the hymns in thirty different *rāgas* or musical patterns. A precise method was followed in setting down the compositions. First came *sabads* by the Gurus in the order of their succession. Then came *chhands*, other poetic forms in a set order and the *vārs*. The compositions of the Gurus in each *rāga* were followed by those of the Bhaktas in the same format. Gurmukhī was the script used for transcription.

A genius unique in spiritual insight and not unconcerned with methodological design had created a scripture with an exalted mystical tone and a high degree of organization. It was large in size—nearly 7,000 hymns—containing compositions of the first five Gurus and fifteen saints of different faiths and castes, including the Muslim Sufi, Shaikh Farid, Ravidās, a shoemaker, and Sain, a barber. The first copy of the sacred book prepared under the care of Guru Arjun is preserved to this day in a family of the descendants at Kartārpur, in Jullundur district of the Punjab. The site of these marvellous labours is marked by a shrine called Rāmsar.

The completion of the Granth was celebrated with much jubilation. In thanksgiving, *karāhprasād* was prepared in huge quantities. Sikhs came in large numbers to see the Holy Volume. They were rejoiced in their hearts by a sight of it and bowed before it in veneration. Among the visitors was Bhāī Banno who had led a group of Sikhs from Māngat, in western Punjab. Guru Arjun, who knew him as a devoted Sikh, instructed him to go to Lahore and have the Book bound. Banno sought the Guru's permission to take the Granth first to his native Mangat for the sake of the local Sikhs. The Guru allowed this, but enjoined him not to tarry at a place more than a night.

As Banno left Amritsar with his sacred charge, it occurred to him to have a second copy transcribed. Since the first copy, he argued, would remain with the Guru, there must be an additional one for the *sangat*. The Guru's direction forbade him to stay longer than one night at a place, but he had said nothing about the time to be spent on the journey. He proposed to his companions that they should travel by easy marches of five miles a day. The time thus saved was utilized in transcribing the holy writ. Sikhs wrote with love and devotion and nobody shirked his duty whether it was day or night. By the time they reached Lahore, the second copy was ready, but Banno had added to it some apocryphal texts. He had both volumes bound and returned to Amritsar as fast as he could.

At Amritsar, he was received with due ceremony, though Guru Arjun was not a little surprised to see two volumes instead of one. Bhāī Banno spoke truthfully: "Lord, there is

nothing that is hidden from thee. This second copy I have had made for the *sangat*." But the Guru put his seal only on the volume written in Bhāī Gurdās' hand. He enjoined the Sikhs to own the Granth equal with the Guru and make no distinction between the two. "He who would wish to see the Guru, let him see the Granth. He who would seek the Guru's word, let him read the Granth with love and attention."

Guru Arjun asked where the Granth be installed. Bhāī Buddhā said, "You are omniscient, Master! But there is no place more suitable for the Holy Book than the Harimandir." The Guru was pleased to hear these words "like one who has sighted the new moon." He then recited praise of the Harimandir: "There is nothing like it in all the three worlds. Harimandir is like the ship—the means for the people to cross over the worldly ocean. A new joy pervades here every day. One sight of it annuls all sins."

It was decided to spend the night at Rāmsar and return to Amritsar the next morning. The Granth rested on a seat under the canopy, while the Guru and the Sikhs slept on the ground.

A disciple had to be chosen to take charge of the Granth. As says the *Gurbilās Chhevīn Pātshāhī*, Guru Arjun lay awake through the night reflecting on the question. His choice finally fell on the revered Bhāī Buddhā whose devotion was universally lauded. In the morning, Guru Arjun and his Sikhs performed their ablutions. The former practised his wonted meditation. At dawn the entire *sangat* marched towards the Harimandir. Bhāī Buddhā carried the Holy Book on his head and Guru Arjun walked behind holding the whisk over it in homage. The musicians sang *sabads* and thus they reached the holy temple. The Granth was ceremonially installed in the centre of the inner sanctuary on August 16, 1604. Bhāī Buddhā opened it with reverence to receive from it the divine command or lesson, as Guru Arjun stood in attendance behind. The following hymn was read as God's own word for the occasion:

> He Himself hath succoured His saints
> in their work,
> He himself hath come to see their task fulfilled,

Blessed is the earth, blessed the tank;
Blessed is the tank with *amrit* filled.
Amrit overfloweth the tank: He hath had the task completed.

* * * *

Eternal is the Perfect Being,
His praises Vedas and Purānas sing.
The Creator hath bestowed on me the nine treasures,
and all the charisms.

* * * *

No lack do I suffer now.
Enjoying His largesse, bliss have I attained;
Ever-expanding is the Lord's bounty.

Guru Arjun directed that during the day the Granth should remain in the Harimandir and at night, after the *Sohilā* was read, it should be taken to the room he had built for himself in Guru-kā-Mahal. As the evening advanced by two watches, Bhāī Buddhā recited the *Sohilā* and made the concluding *ardās* or supplication. The Granth was closed and wrapped in silks. Bhāī Buddhā held it on his head and marched towards the chamber indicated by Guru Arjun. The Guru and the *sangat* followed singing hymns. The Granth was placed on the appointed seat and Guru Arjun slept on the ground by its side. Daily, in the small hours of the morning, the Holy Book was taken out in state to the Harimandir and brought at night to rest in the room marked for it by Guru Arjun. The practice continues to this day, except that now the Sacred Volume is kept for the night in a room at the Akāl Takht.

The Harimandir and the Granth Sāhib were two concrete statements of the crystallizing Sikh faith. The former provided a central place of worship, whereas the latter became a key factor in the organization of the community. Both proved to be of great significance in moulding Sikh self-consciousness and in the reification of Sikh life and society. The Granth Sāhib was the permanent repository of the Gurus' message, the revealer of Divine truth, and was meant to be the spiritual and religious guide of the Sikhs for all time. It became the source of their literary tradition and it shaped their intellectual and cultural environment. It gave form and meaning to their religious style and social customs. When Guru Gobind Singh

ended personal guruship and passed on the succession to it in perpetuity, it itself acquired the status of Guru. The Guru Granth has since been revered as the body visible of the Gurus. As such, its role in guaranteeing the integration and permanence of the community and in determining the course of its history has been of prime significance.

The Granth Sāhib, containing hymns of the Sikh Gurus and of Hindu and Muslim saints, was a puzzle to people of orthodox views. No one had known a religious book of this kind. Complaints were made to the Mughal emperor that the Book was derogatory to Islam and other religions. Akbar, who was then encamped at Batālā in the Punjab, sent for Guru Arjun. The Guru sent Bhāī Buddhā and Bhāī Gurdās with the Granth. The Book was opened at random and read from a spot pointed out by Akbar. The hymn was in praise of God. So were the others read out subsequently.

Akbar was highly pleased and made an offering of fifty-one gold *mohurs* to the Granth Sāhib. He presented Bhāī Buddhā and Bhāī Gurdās with robes of honour and gave a third one for the Guru.

Akbar had himself visited Guru Arjun earlier, at Goindwāl, on November 24, 1598, and besought him for spiritual guidance. At the Guru's instance, he remitted 10 to 12 per cent of the land revenue in the Punjab. To the emperor, Guru Arjun recited the following hymn:

> One man invokes Ram, another Khuda;
> One man worships Gosain, another Allah;
> Some speak of the Cause of causes,
>   others of the Benevolent;
> Some talk of the Extender of mercy,
>   others of the Merciful;
> Some bathe at the Hindu sacred places,
>   others visit Mecca;
> Some perform the Hindu worship,
>   others bow their heads in the Muhammadan fashion.
> Some read the Vedas,
>   others the Musalman books;
> Some wear white,
>   others blue;
> Some call themselves Hindus,
>   others Musalmans
> Some aspire to the heaven of the Hindus,
>   others to the heaven of the Muhammadans;

But he who recognizes God's Will, says Nānak,
knows the secret of the Lord God.

In the time of Guru Arjun, the Sikh faith gained a large number of adherents. On the testimony of a contemporary Persian source, *Dabistān-i-Mazāhib*, "During the time of each Mahal [Guru], the Sikhs increased till in the reign of Guru Arjun Mall they became numerous and there were not many cities in the inhabited countries where some Sikhs were not to be found." By this time, Sikh doctrine had also become more sharply defined. Again, in the words of *Dabistān-i-Mazāhib*, "The disciples of Guru Nānak condemn idol worship. Their belief is that all their Gurus are Nānaks. They do not read the *mantras* of the Hindus. They do not venerate their temples or idols, nor do they esteem their *avatārs*. They have no regard for the Sanskrit language which, according to the Hindus, is the speech of the angels."

Jahāngīr, who succeeded Akbar on the throne of Delhi in 1605, was not as liberal as his father. In his early years on the throne, he depended more on the orthodox section among his courtiers. This coterie was under the influence of Shaikh Ahmad of Sirhind (1569-1624), leader of the Naqshbandī order of the Sufis, whose one aim was to have Emperor Akbar's policy of religious neutrality and eclecticism reversed. The Sikh order was the first to bear the brunt of Jahāngīr's hostility. Jahāngīr felt especially alarmed at its growing influence. As he wrote in his *Tuzuk*: "So many of the simple-minded Hindus, nay, many foolish Muslims too had been fascinated by the Guru's ways and teaching . . . . For many years the thought had been presenting itself to my mind that either I should put an end to this false traffic, or that he be brought into the fold of Islam."

Detractors of Sikhism now had their chance. Among them was a Hindu official of the Mughal viceroy of Lahore, named Chandū Shāh. A campaign of slander was started and the emperor ordered Guru Arjun to be arrested. To quote again from his memoirs: "I fully knew of his heresies, and I ordered that he should be brought into my presence, that his property be confiscated, and that he should be put to death with torture."

For several days the Guru was subjected to extreme physical torment. He was seated on red-hot iron plates and burning sand was poured over him. He was dipped in boiling water. Miān Mīr, the Guru's Muslim friend, came to see him and offered to intercede on his behalf. But the Guru forbade him and enjoined him to find peace in God's Will.

Guru Arjun was then taken to the Rāvī. A dip in the river's cold water was more than the blistered body could bear. Wrapped in meditation, the Guru peacefully passed away (May 30, 1606). As a contemporary Jesuit document—a letter written from Lahore on September 25, 1606, by Father Jerome Xavier—says, "In that way their good Pope died, overwhelmed by the sufferings, torments and dishonours."

The event marked the fulfilment of Guru Nānak's religious and ethical injunctions. Personal piety must have a core of moral strength. A virtuous soul must be a courageous soul. Willingness to suffer trial for one's convictions was a religious imperative. Guru Arjun's life exemplified this principle.

The man who derived the most satisfaction from the execution of Guru Arjun was Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindī Mujaddid-i-alf-i-sānī. In his letter, as quoted at No. 193, in *Maktubāt-i-Imām Rabbānī*, he expressed jubilation over "the execution of the accursed *kāfir* of Goindwāl."

CHAPTER IV

HEROISM OUT OF HOLY TRADITION

Guru Arjun's martyrdom marked a turning point in the history of the Sikh faith. Instead of the rosary and other saintly emblems of spiritual inheritance, his son Guru Hargobind wore a warrior's equipment for the ceremonies of succession. He put on two swords, declaring one to be the symbol of his spiritual and the other that of his temporal investiture. This was a significant act crucial to the future evolution of the Sikh community.

Until the time of Guru Arjun, the Sikhs had been a sect of peaceable people. The Fifth Guru himself set a worthy example of moral remonstrance against intolerance and made the supreme sacrifice to uphold his faith. His successor, Guru Hargobind, foresaw that sterner methods were required to meet the growing oppression of the Mughal rulers. So he adopted the style of a soldier. For this he had the sanction of his father who had had him trained in manly skills and who had advised him to bear arms. As history attests, Guru Hargobind gave a martial turn to the career of the community. The prevailing political situation hastened this process. Guru Hargobind's task had been made easier by the awakening brought about by the teaching of his predecessors. Yet it is remarkable how he created a warlike spirit among people weakened by prolonged subjugation. In his lifetime, he had forged the instruments of a mighty revolution.

Hargobind was born on June 19, 1595, at Wadālī, near Amritsar. He was eleven when his father was martyred in Lahore. The rising community faced a grave crisis. Guru Hargobind was young in years, but he rose to the occasion. By his wisdom and courage, he was able to preserve the disciples' spirit and unity and build up a strong force of resistance.

As a small boy, he had been entrusted to the care of the revered Bhāī Buddhā. Guru Arjun had wished that he should, alongside of his initiation into the sacred lore, master the arts of archery and swordsmanship. Hargobind showed aptitude for both learning and the physical skills. He turned out to be an excellent horseman and loved to follow the chase. Few could match his dexterity with the sword or his boldness of spirit.

Soon after his succession, Guru Hargobind sent out messages to the *masands* that the Sikhs should in future bring him gifts of horses and arms. He kept a bodyguard of fifty-two armed. Sikhs. Many more came from all over the Punjab—from Mājhā, Mālwā and Doābā—to offer him their services. To five hundred of them he gave horses and weapons of war. Bidhī Chand, Pirānā, Jethā, Pairā and Langāh were appointed leadere, each with a command of 100 men. To fortify the town of Amritsar, he built in 1609 a fortress called Lohgarh.

Another symbol of temporal authority Guru Hargobind had instituted was the Akāl Takht, in front of the Harimandir. According to the *Gurbilās Chhevīn Pātshāhī*, the oldest account of Guru Hargobind's life, the structure was raised on June 15, 1606. Guru Hargobind laid the cornerstone, and Bhāī Buddhā and Bhāī Gurdās completed the construction, no third person being allowed to take part in it. Guru Hargobind used the site for the ceremonies of succession which, according to the *Gurbilās*, took place on Har 26, 1663 BK/June 24, 1606. From here he conducted the secular affairs of the community. In the open space between the Harimandir and the Akāl Takht were held tournaments of physical feats every afternoon, and here the bards, Abdullāh and Natthā, recited heroic poetry.

By virtue of being the seat of the Guru and by its connection with Sikh *sangats* in far-flung regions through a chain of *masands*, Amritsar had developed the characteristics of a State capital. Sikhs kept coming throughout the year to render honour to their Guru. They brought with them presents of weapons and horses. Baisākhī and Divālī were observed as special festivals when disciples visited in much larger numbers. The person of the Guru was the object of veneration; the focus of worship was the Harimandir, in the middle of the sacred pool, where was kept the Holy Book prepared by Guru Arjun.

The Akāl Takht was the symbol of temporal authority. Amritsar, under Guru Hargobind, was permeated with a fresh spiritual leaven and with a fervent spirit of devotion and moral vigour. A new impulse of chivalry was in evidence in the Punjab as a whole. Its mainspring was the spirit of faith and courage created by the teachings of the Gurus.

In spite of his soldierly style, Guru Hargobind observed in his personal living the simple standards established by his predecessors. He carried out the religious duties of his office with the same piety and dedication. It was, in fact, in fulfilment of the prophecy of Guru Nānak that he gave a virile direction to the Sikh movement.

Emperor Jahāngīr was alarmed at the reports he received about the growing influence of Guru Hargobind. The traducers said that the Guru kept splendid style, had armed attendants and was addressed by his followers as Sachchā Pādshāh (the True King). The emperor ordered that Guru Hargobind be taken into custody and detained in the fort at Gwālior. There he remained imprisoned for a few months sometime between A.D. 1617 and 1619 along with a number of feudal chiefs from various parts of the country. The royal prisoners were captivated by the personality of the Guru who combined dignity of mien with pious devotion. When at last he was going to be released, he refused to leave the fort until his co-prisoners were allowed to come out with him. His wish was acceded to and a number of princes gained their freedom with him.

According to the *Bhatt Vahī Multānī Sindhī*, Guru Hargobind visited the village of Hehar, in the Mājhā region, on December 26, 1620, to mourn the death of his uncle Prithī Chand. He also saw the loss of two leading and venerable disciples, Bhāī Buddhā and Bhāī Gurdās, who had been the bulwark of Sikhism. The former died at his village, Ramdās, on November 16, 1631, and the latter at Goindwāl on August 25, 1636. Older than both was Bābā Srī Chand who passed away at Kīratpur on January 15, 1629.

Jahāngīr's attitude towards Guru Hargobind became increasingly friendly. The Guru was now able to carry his teaching beyond the limits of the Punjab. He travelled widely, first in the Punjab and Kashmir and then towards the east. In the Punjab, he developed the town of Srī Hargobindpur founded

by his father, Guru Arjun, on the River Beās. As he built there a place of worship for the Sikhs, he constructed a mosque for the Muslims.

Another town Guru Hargobind founded was Kīratpur, in the Sivāliks. The site had been gifted by Rājā Kalyān Chand of Kahlūr at the time of his visit to Amritsar. He was one of the chieftains who had earned their reprieve at Gwālīor by Guru Hargobind's intercession. Ceremonies for the founding of the new habitation were performed by Bābā Srī Chand, son of Guru Nānak, who planted the first bush and cut ground for the *bāolī* on May 1, 1626.

Guru Hargobind's eastern journey took him as far as Nānakmatā. At Srīnagar, in Garhwāl hills, the Maratha saint Samarth Rāmdās (1608-1681), who became Shivājī's mentor, met him. Guru Hargobind had just returned from a hunting excursion. He was fully armed and rode a horse. The sight surprised Rāmdās and he spoke out, "I had heard that you occupied Guru Nānak's *gaddī*. Nānak was a *tyāgī sādhū*—a saint who had renounced the world. You are wearing arms and maintain troops and horses. You allow yourself to be addressed as Sachchā Pādshāh, the True King. What sort of a *sādhū* are you?"

Guru Hargobind replied, "Internally a hermit and externally a prince. Arms mean protection to the poor and destruction to the tyrant. Bābā Nānak had not renounced the world. He had only renounced *māyā*, i.e. illusion and ego."

"*Yeh hamāre man bhāvatī hai* (this appeals to my mind)," said Samarth Rāmdās.

In the Sikh tradition, this incident is traced to an old Punjabi manuscript entitled *Panjāh Sākhīān*. Interestingly, Samarth Rāmdās' meeting with Guru Hargobind is corroborated in a Marathi source, *Rāmdāsasvāmī's Bakhar* by Hanumantsvāmī, written in 1793, though the details of the meeting are an apparent distortion.

Once Emperor Shāh Jahān, who had ascended the throne on February 4, 1628, was out hunting in the neighbourhood of Amritsar. One of his favourite hawks flew and fell into the hands of the Sikhs. The royal messengers came to claim the hawk, but the Sikhs refused to part with it. The emperor was annoyed and sent a body of troops under Mukhlis Khān, the

faujdār of Lahore, to arrest the Guru. The Sikhs fought back. Mukhlis Khān was killed in the encounter which took place at the site now occupied by the Khālsā College. His soldiers fled back to Lahore. This, according to the *Bhatt Vahī Multānī Sindhī*, occurred on April 14, 1634. In this battle was killed Bhatt Kīrat, son of Bhikkhā. Both father and son have their hymns included in the Guru Granth.

This Amritsar action was a small incident, but its implications were far-reaching. The Sikh faith, turned militant under Mughal persecution, had challenged the authority of the rulers.

Soon afterwards, Guru Hargobind left Amritsar never to return. This time he took the Granth Sāhib with him. The Sacred Volume had not gone out of Amritsar since its installation in the Harimandir by Guru Arjun. The Granth Sāhib was, according to the *Gurbilās Chhevīn Pātshāhī*, placed in a bejewelled palanquin carried by Sikhs on their shoulders. Two Sikhs, Bidhī Chand and Jethā, did the Holy Book homage by reverentially holding the whisk over it. Guru Hargobind walked behind them. Before departing from Amritsar, he, along with his family, paid obeisance at Harimandir and at Akāl Takht and made offerings of *karāhprasād*.

The first long halt was at Daraulī, near Mogā, in present-day Farīdkot district. From there Guru Hargobind sent the Granth Sāhib with the family to Kartārpur. He himself sojourned in the Mālwā a little longer, visiting his Sikhs and confronting the Mughal troops in yet another battle, this time at Mahrāj, on December 16, 1634. At Mahrāj, he was waylaid by Lallā Beg Kābulī. The latter's object was to seize the horses which Bidhī Chand, a gallant Sikh, had boldly recovered from the possession of the Mughals. The horses belonged to a Sikh, who was bringing them from Kabul as an offering for Guru Hargobind, but they were captured on the way by the governor of Lahore. The first horse Bidhī Chand recovered disguised as a hayseller. For the second, he went as an astrologer. On each occasion, he rode the animal to safety before anyone could know what had happened. Feeling slighted, the Mughal governor had sent out a force to punish the Sikhs.

Guru Hargobind then had nearly four thousand armed Sikhs with him. This number was augmented by stalwarts from the Mālwā territory. A pitched battle took place in which twelve

hundred Sikhs were killed. The imperial troops suffered a much heavier loss and were in the end repulsed. Their commander, Lallā Beg, fell in the battle. In commemoration of the victory, Guru Hargobind excavated on the site a tank called Gurusar.

Kartārpur was the scene of yet another of the conflicts Guru Hargobind had to engage in. This was caused by one of his own soldiers, Paindā Khān, the Pathan. Paindā Khān had come to the Guru as a young orphan and remained with him. He now turned against his master. He received help from the Mughals and attacked Kartārpur with a strong force on April 26, 1635. Paindā Khān fell in single combat with the Guru, and the Sikhs emerged triumphant once again.

Guru Hargobind finally retired to Kīratpur where he spent the remaining nine years of his life in peace. This small town, in the foot of the hills, was now the centre of the Sikh faith. Here Sikhs gathered on festivals and other important days from the remotest parts. According to the *Guru kīān Sākhīān* (MS.), there came on one such occasion "Bhānā, of the family of Bhāī Buddhā, with a *sangat* from the village of Ramdās; Māī Dās, of the family of Ballū, from Alīpur Shamālī, with a *sangat* from Multan district; Kaulā of the family of Ambīā, with a *sangat* from Siālkot district; Bahilo with a *sangat* from Bhāī ke Phaphre; Rājā Kalyān Chand of Kahlūr, with his son Tārā Chand; Rājā Himmat Chand of Handūr, with his minister, Dharam Chand; and other Sikhs in large numbers from all four directions. They all came for a sight of the Guru." The report indicates how widely Sikhism was spread in northern India by Guru Hargobind's time.

Guru Hargobind gave most of his time to religious devotions and to strengthening the Sikh faith. Old warriors like Bidhī Chand were sent out as preachers. For Sikhs, the roles of saint and soldier had become mutually complementary. About the Guru himself Bhāī Gurdās wrote: "Great hero is Guru Hargobind. He is the breaker of enemy ranks, yet his heart is full of love and charity." This synthesis of the heroic and the spiritual was Guru Hargobind's distinctive contribution to the evolution of the Sikh people. Some historians have presented this process as a reversal of the principles proclaimed by his predecessors. But a true appreciation will require a more patient and deeper study. Especially relevant in this context will be the Sikh tradition's

own self-understanding so far as this development is concerned. Guru Hargobind took up arms only to uphold the values established by his predecessors. His own father had laid down his life for these principles. To resist intolerance and tyranny was in keeping with the spirit of the teaching of Guru Nānak, who had expressed himself strongly against the oppression practised by the Mughal invaders. The inner principle of Sikhism as determined by him was fully worked out during the lives of nine succeeding Gurus. What happened in Guru Hargobind's time was a necessity prescribed by the prevailing situation.

A contemporary author Zulfiqār Ardistānī, who knew Guru Hargobind personally and who had lived in his company at Kīratpur, wrote in his *Dabistān-i-Mazāhib*: "The Sikhs worship Guru Hargobind as divine. Their belief is that he is God, having manifested himself six times." Ardistānī also bears witness to the strong consciousness among the Sikhs of the continuing presence of Guru Nānak and to the living Sikh belief that all the Gurus shared the same light. To quote the *Dabistān* again: "Nānak absorbed himself in Guru Angad who was his most devoted disciple and Guru Angad was Nānak himself. After that, at the time of his death, Guru Angad entered into the body of Amar Dās. He in the same manner occupied a place in the body of Rām Dās and Rām Dās in the same way got united with Arjun Mall. They give everyone the name of a *mahal*; the first *mahal* being Nānak, the second *mahal* Angad and so on, till the fifth *mahal*, who now is Arjun Mall. They say that whoever does not acknowledge Guru Arjun Mall to be the very self of Bābā Nānak becomes a *manmukh* or non-believer."

Zulfiqār Ardistānī also cites examples of the Sikhs' devotion to the Guru: "Once the Guru went inside a garden. He said to Jhandā [one of his Sikhs], 'You remain at the gate.' By chance the Guru, going out through another exit, went home. Jhandā stood there for three days till Guru Hargobind, on hearing of it, called him back. . . . Sādh is one of the disciples of the Guru. According to the Guru's orders, he set out from Balakh to Iraq to buy horses. He had a grown-up son who fell sick. People said, 'You are still in the city of Balakh, only one stage distant from home; go back and see your son.' He replied, 'If he dies, there is plenty of firewood in the house.

You may cremate him. I must go to serve my Guru. I will not turn back.' The boy passed away, but he [the Sikh] did not return."

On the liberalizing influence of Sikhism, Ardistānī quotes an anecdote: "Among the Sikhs there is nothing of the austerities and worship as enjoined by the religious laws of the Hindus. In eating and drinking they have no restrictions. When Partāp Mall Giānī saw a Hindu boy who had a mind to embrace Islam, he said, 'Why do you become a Muhammadan? If you have an inclination to eat everything, you may become a Sikh of the Guru and eat whatever you like.' "

Guru Hargobind had five sons. They were Bābā Gurdittā, Sūraj Mall, Anī Rāi, Bābā Atal and Tegh Bahādur. Bābā Gurdittā who died in his father's lifetime left two sons, Dhīr Mall and Har Rāi. The latter was gentle by nature and had a devout temperament. He was Guru Hargobind's favourite grandchild. He had been given the name of Har Rāi by the Guru himself.

Once, as the story goes, Har Rāi was returning home after his riding exercise. From a distance he saw Guru Hargobind sitting in the garden. He at once got off his horse to go and do him homage. In this hurry his robe was caught in a bush and a few of the flowers were broken from their stems. This pained Har Rāi's heart. He sat down on the spot and wept bitterly.

Guru Hargobind came and consoled him. He also advised him: "Wear your robe by all means, but be careful as you walk. It behoves God's servants to be tender to all things."

There was a deeper meaning in the Guru's words. One must live in this world, and yet be master of oneself. One should not be at the mercy of worldly temptations. As Guru Nānak had said, "He who conquers the mind conquers the world."

Guru Hargobind knew Har Rāi to be the fittest to inherit the "light" from him. He nominated him as his successor and consecrated him Guru before departing this life on March 3, 1644.

Guru Har Rāi kept the style Guru Hargobind had introduced. He was attended by armed followers, but no further conflict with the ruling power occurred. The Sikh faith

continued to gain strength. Guru Har Rāi appointed disciples to preach in different regions of the country. A *sannyāsī*, called Bhagwān Gīr, was converted and sent to eastern India. Another disciple, named Bhāī Pherū after initiation, was sent to Rajasthan. Suthre Shāh was appointed to Delhi. The ancestors of present-day families of Bāgrīān and Kaithal preached in the Mālwā region. Guru Har Rāi himself travelled extensively in this area and a large number of people accepted his teaching. A child to receive his special blessing was Phūl, who became the founder of the families of Patiālā, Nābhā and Jīnd. These families ruled in their territories in the Punjab until recent years.

Kīratpur, in the hills, was Guru Har Rāi's permanent seat. Here disciples and visitors came to seek blessings and instruction. The Guru kept the daily practice of his predecessors. The *langar* continued to be the central factor in the social transformation Sikhism had initiated. Guru Har Rāi chose himself the simplest fare which was earned by the labour of his own hands. In the morning, he sat in the *sangat* and explained the Sikh doctrine. He did not compose any hymns of his own, but quoted those of his predecessors in his discourses. He often repeated to his followers the following verses of Bhāī Gurdās:

> A true Sikh rises before the night ends,
> And turns his thoughts to God's Name,
> To charity and to holy bathing.
> He speaks humbly and humbly he walks,
> He wishes everyone well and he is joyed to give away gifts from
>   his hand.
> He sleeps but little,
> And little does he eat and talk.
> Thus he receives the Guru's true instruction.
> He lives by the labour of his hands and he does good deeds.
> However eminent he might become,
> He demonstrates not himself.
> He sings God's praises in the company of holy men.
> Such company he seeks night and day.
> Upon Word is his mind fixed.
> And he delights in the Guru's will.
> Unenticed he lives in this world of enticement.

Guru Har Rāi was at Goindwāl when Dārā Shukoh, heir

apparent to the Mughal throne, entered the Punjab fleeing in front of the army of his brother, Aurangzib, after his defeat in the battle of Sāmūgarh on May 29, 1658. At Goindwāl, where he arrived in the last week of June 1658, he called on Guru Har Rāi, and sought the consolation of his blessing. The prince was of a liberal religious leaning, and had a natural inclination for the company of saintly persons. He was especially an admirer of the famous Muslim Sufi, Mīān Mīr, who was known to the Sikh Gurus. Sikh tradition also recalls how Dārā Shukoh had once been cured of a serious malady with herbs sent to him by Guru Har Rāi. In his affliction now, he readily took the opportunity of having an audience with the Guru.

Guru Har Rāi left Goindwāl on a tour of the central districts of the Punjab where the Sikh faith had taken root in the time of his predecessors. He travelled further on to Kashmir. The Baisākhī of 1660 was celebrated at Siālkot in the home of Nand Lāl Purī, grandfather of Haqīqat Rāi, the martyr. The journey was resumed in the company of Sikhs such as Makkhan Shāh, the Lubānā trader, and Arū Rām, father of Kirpā Rām Datt, who later led to the presence of Guru Tegh Bahādur a group of Kashmiri pandits driven to dire distress by State persecution. Guru Har Rāi arrived at Srīnagar, via Mārtand, on May 19, 1660, and visited Motā Tāndā, the village to which his disciple, Makkhan Shāh, belonged. On his way back, he stopped at Akhnūr and Jammu. At the latter place, the local *masand*, Bhāī Kāhnā, waited on him with the *sangat*.

Dārā Shukoh's meeting with Guru Har Rāi was misrepresented to Emperor Aurangzib. Highly coloured stories were carried to him. His officials and courtiers reported to him that Guru Har Rāi was a rebel and that he had helped the fugitive prince, Dārā Shukoh. Further, that the Sikh Scripture contained verses derogatory to Islam. The emperor asked Rājā Jai Singh of Amber to have Guru Har Rāi brought to Delhi. The Rājā's envoy, Harī Chand, who reached Kīratpur on the Baisākhī day of 1661, presented the royal summons. Guru Har Rāi wondered why he had been called to Delhi and, to quote the *Srī Gur Pratāp Sūraj Granth*, Bhāī Santokh Singh's full-scale poeticized account of the Gurus' lives, said, "I rule

over no territory, I owe the king no tax, nor do I want anything from him. There is no connection of teacher and disciple between us, either. Of what avail will this meeting be?"

He sent for his elder son, Rām Rāi, and charged him to go and meet the emperor. He asked his minister, Diwān Dargāh Mall, to escort him to Delhi. According to the *Guru kīān Sākhīān*, Guru Har Rāi blessed his young son as he seated him in the carriage and gave the following exhortation: "Answer squarely and without fear any questions the emperor may ask. Exhibit no hesitation. Read the Granth attentively as you make halts on the way. The Guru will protect you wherever you might be." Gurdās, of the family of Bhāī Bahilo, was asked to accompany Rām Rāi with a copy of the Granth Sāhib. Rām Rāi set out from Kīratpur on March 30, 1661, as attested by an entry in the *Bhatt Vahī Multānī Sindhī Khātā Jalhāne Kā*:

> *Gurū Rām Rāi, betā Gurū Har Rāi Sāhib mahal satmā kā. . . Sūrajbansī, Gosal gotra, Sodhī Khatrī, bāsī Kīratpur, parganah Kahlūr, pitā Gurūjī kā bachan pāi sāl satrān sai athārān Baisākh pravishte dūj ke dihun Kīratpur se Dillī kī taraf āye. Rājā Jai Singh Mirzā ke dūt Harī Chand ke gail, sāth Diwān Dargāh Mall āyā, betā Dwārkā Dās Chhibbar kā, Manī Rām āyā, betā Māī Dās Jalhāne Puār kā, Darīyā āyā, betā Mūle Jalhāne kā, hor Sikh faqīr āye.*
>
> Guru Rām Rāi, son of Guru Har Rāi Sāhib, the Seventh Guru, Sūrajbansī, Gosal *gotra*, Sodhī Khatrī of Kīratpur, *parganah* Kahlūr, came from Kīratpur towards Delhi on Baisākh 2, Samvat 1718/March 30, 1661, at the bidding of his father-Guru, with Harī Chand, the envoy of Rājā Jai Singh Mirzā. Accompanying him were Diwān Dargāh Mall, son of Dwārkā Dās Chhibbar, Manī Rām, son of Māī Dās, Jalhānā Puār, Darīyā, son of Mūlā Jalhānā, and other Sikh saints.

Reading and expounding on the way the Guru's word, Rām Rāi reached Delhi by easy marches and encamped on the bank of the Jamunā, outside the city.

It is said that Emperor Aurangzib sent him through a noble a dress treated with poison. Rām Rāi repeated the word "Wāhiguru" and put on the robe. To quote the *Guru kīān Sākhīān*: "Even as a serpent's body cools as it touches the *sandal*-tree, the poison filtered through the garment." The emperor, who always expected his holy visitors to give

demonstration of their mystic arts, felt impressed when he heard the story. Old texts record several such miracles. The *Mahimā Prakāsh* narrates six and the *Srī Gur Pratāp Sūraj Granth* narrates forty.

Rām Rāi overreached himself when, to please the emperor, he deliberately misread one of the verses from the Granth Sāhib and substituted the word *beīmān*, i.e. faithless or evil, for *Musalman*. The original hymn, in English rendering, reads:

> The clay from a Musalman's grave
> Is kneaded into the potter's clump.
> It is shaped into vessels and bricks
> And then burns in the kiln.
> Burning, it wails—
>   helpless clay,
> By cinders engulfed.
> The Creator, sayeth Nānak, alone knows
> What befalls the soul
>   which has departed,
> The Creator who is the Cause of all causes.

The *sabad* reflects on the essentially conditioned state of man against the mystery and absoluteness of Divine power and on the futility of dividing humanity by the rites of cremation, burial, etc. It criticizes no creed. No one, in any manner, had the authority to change the sacred text. The Guru's word was unalterable. Sikhs such as Dargāh Mall, Gurdās, Manī Rām and Kalyānā, who had accompanied Rām Rāi to Delhi, censured him for his temerity. They charged him with corrupting the sacred verse and forthwith sent a letter to Guru Har Rāi, who was displeased to learn what his son had done. He anathematized him for altering Guru Nānak's utterance and, to quote the *Guru kīān Sākhīān*, he wrote to him: "The interpretation you have given of the Guru's verse is not the correct one. By garbling the holy line you have committed an unpardonable sin."

Rām Rāi bade the emperor farewell and returned to the Punjab to atone for the sacrilege. As he reached the vicinity of Kīratpur, he sent word to his father through Dargāh Mall and Bhāī Binnā Uppal and awaited his instruction. Guru Har Rāi wrote to him: "I did not like the way you explained Guru

Nānak's line. You go where you want to, but don't show your face to me." Rām Rāi was debarred from the Guru's presence.

Guru Har Rāi chose Har Krishan, his younger son, to be his successor. He considered him fit for the rank of Guru and passed his elder son over in his favour. He sent for Har Krishan who came and met his father by bowing his head before him. Guru Har Rāi gave him his own seat and proclaimed him Guru. He bade the Sikhs to look upon him as his own image. The whole assembly rose to do homage to the new Guru.

Guru Har Rāi passed away the following day (October 6, 1661). Guru Har Krishan consoled the disciples. He asked them not to give way to despair but abide by the Will of the Almighty. All should sing God's praises and not weep or lament, he said.

As days went by, the disciples began pouring in from far and near. They were delighted to have a sight of the Guru. He sat on the throne, a small figure, young in years, but mature in wisdom. Says Bhāī Santokh Singh, "The early morning sun looks small in size, but its light is everywhere. So was Guru Har Krishan's fame, without limit." Those who came to see him were instructed in true knowledge. They had their heart's desires fulfilled and their sins erased. The Sikhs recognized him as the very picture of Guru Nānak. They saw on Guru Har Krishan's handsome face the same light as must have been on Guru Nānak's.

Guru Har Krishan had a rare ability in explaining passages from the Holy Granth. He delighted the hearts of his disciples by his commentaries. He reminded them to cherish the One God alone, and asked them to discard passions and learn the virtues of patience, charity and love. Thus Guru Har Krishan carried on the teaching of the Gurus and preserved intact the legacy he had inherited from them.

The Baisākhī day (March 29) of 1662 brought to Kīratpur vast numbers of followers. The festival lasted three days. The *sangats* were looked after by the Guru's grandmother, Mātā Bassī, and mother, Mātā Sulakkhnī. In the *sangat* of Siālkot district was Pair Mall of Pasrūr, along with his family. His son, Khem Karan, was a promising youth. Mātā Bassī betrothed her granddaughter, Bībī Rūp Kaur, to him. Nuptials were

held on December 3, 1662. According to the *Guru kīān Sākhīān*, the presents offered by Mātā Bassī included a *pothī* of stories from Guru Har Rāi's mouth and a dagger belonging to Guru Hargobind.

Emperor Aurangzib was not pleased to hear about the growing fame of Guru Har Krishan. He sent for him to Delhi as he had sent for his father, Guru Har Raī. Guru Har Rāi had not gone himself, but had sent his elder son, Rām Rāi, to the emperor's court. Now, when a servant of Rājā Jai Singh of Amber arrived with the emperor's message, Guru Har Krishan took counsel with his leading Sikhs. They said to him with clasped hands, "We are thy servants, Lord. With thy knowledge of all the three worlds, thou knowest best." Guru Har Krishan called the messenger and told him that he would accompany him to Delhi.

Guru Har Krishan travelled through Ropar, Banūr and Ambālā. Along the way, he instructed the disciples who came to call on him. As he neared Panjokharā, a Sikh spoke with humility, "*Sangats* are coming from Peshawar, Kabul and Kashmir. Stay here a day so that they may have the chance of seeing you, Master." The Guru agreed.

In that village lived a pandit, Lāl Chand by name, who was proud of his caste as well as of his learning. He came to see the Guru and spoke with derision: "It is said that you sit on the *gaddī* of Guru Nānak. But what do you know of the old religious books?" Chhajjū Rām, the illiterate, dark-skinned village water-carrier, happened to pass by at that moment. Guru Har Krishan asked Dargāh Mall to call him. As Chhajjū Rām came, the Guru enquired if he would explain to the pandit the gist of the *Bhagavadgītā*. The illiterate villager astonished everyone by his cogent commentary on the sacred book. Lāl Chand's pride was overcome. Humbly he fell at the Guru's feet. Both he and Chhajjū Rām became the Guru's disciples and travelled with him up to Kurukshetra. The former entered the fold of the Khālsā in Guru Gobind Singh's time, and took the name of Lāl Singh. Lāl Singh met with a hero's death fighting in the battle of Chamkaur on December 7, 1705.

In Delhi, Guru Har Krishan put up in Rājā Jai Singh's bungalow which is now the site of Gurdwārā Banglā Sāhib. The house was a spacious one "designed to suit all the

Guru Har Krishan passed away on March 30, 1664. According to the *Guru kīān Sākhīān*, Mātā Bassī, the grandmother, asked Gurdās, of the family of Bhāī Bahilo, to start a reading of the Holy Granth in his memory. Dargāh Mall and Munshī Kalyān Dās were sent to the Punjab with the mournful news. They first went to Kīratpur to inform Guru Har Krishan's sister, Bībī Rūp Kaur. The next day, they set out for Bakālā to inform Guru Tegh Bahādur. While in Delhi, he had met Guru Har Krishan and now he received the news of his passing away. He consoled the Sikhs and taught them to abide by God's Will.

Diwān Dargāh Mall and Munshī Kalyān Dās stayed at Bakālā for three days before returning to Delhi. According to an entry in the *Bhatt Vahī Talaudā Parganah Jīnd*, the ashes were taken from Delhi to Kīratpur where they were mixed with the waters of the Sutlej. The original entry is as follows:

> *Sangat betā Binne Uppal kā bāsī Amb Mārī, parganah Mīyen kā Maur, Nānū Rām betā Bāghe chhīpe kā bāsī mohallā Dilwālī, Dillī, Jaggū betā Padme kā bāsī Duburjī, parganah Sohdarā, Darīyā betā Mūle kā bāsi Alipur Shamālī, parganah Multan, Guru Har Krishan jī kī bhasam Dillī se le ke Kīratpur āye, parganah Kahlūr, samvat satrān sai ikkīs, Bhādon vadī ikādsī ko. Babhūtī Satludhar nadī main parvāī. Guru jī kī karāhī bāntī.*
>
> Sangat, son of Binnā Uppal, of Amb Mārī, *parganah* Mīyen kā Maur, Nānū Rām, son of Bāghā, calico-printer, of *mohallā* Dilwālī Delhi, Jaggū, son of Padmā, of Duburjī, *parganah* Sohdarā, and Darīyā, son of Mūlā, of Alīpur Shamālī, *parganah*, Multan, carried the ashes of Guru Har Krishan from Delhi and arrived at Kīratpur, *parganah* Kahlūr, on the 11th of the dark half of the month of Bhādon of 1721 BK/August 7, 1664. The ashes were immersed in the River Sutlej. *Karāhprasād* was distributed.

CHAPTER V

THE GURU'S MARTYRDOM

Guru Tegh Bahādur, the youngest of the five sons of Guru Hargobind, was born in Amritsar in the early hours of April 1, 1621. As the news spread at daybreak, Sikhs hurried to the presence of Guru Hargobind to offer their felicitations. The Guru himself went to see the child, accompanied by two of his Sikhs, Bidhī Chand and Jethā. As he set his eyes on him, he predicted auspiciously. In the words of the *Gurbilās Chhevīn Pātshāhī*, he said, "Of my five sons, he shall take the office of Guru. He shall protect the weak and relieve their distress. This shall be his principal mark." Guru Hargobind called the child Tegh Bahādur, Mighty of Sword. The mother, Mātā Nānakī, felt happy to hear her son so named. Much charity was distributed and the rejoicing continued for several days.

Owing to a minor skirmish with a Mughal force, Guru Hargobind removed his family from Amritsar to the anonymity of a nearby village, called Jhabāl. Tegh Bahādur was carried by Mother Nānakī in a palanquin. From Jhabāl, Guru Hargobind travelled to Goindwāl, sacred to the Third Guru. Goindwāl was one of the important Sikh towns in the Punjab. Some other places then well known in Sikh geography were Khadūr Sāhib, sacred to the Second Guru, Tarn Tāran, Srī Hargobindpur and Kartārpur, all three founded by Guru Arjun, the Fifth Guru, Talwandī, birthplace of Guru Nānak, Derā Bābā Nānak, Daraulī and Kīratpur, founded by Guru Hargobind. Similarly, there were towns and villages made famous by the leading Sikh families who lived there. Some of the more prominent among these were Ramdās (Bhāī Buddhā), Sur Singh (Bhāī Bidhī Chand), Bhāī Rūpā (Rūp Chand), Kāngar (Rāi Jodh) and Bābā Bakālā (Bhāī Mehrā).

As they reached Goindwāl, Guru Hargobind, his family and Sikhs made ablutions in the *bāolī* built by Guru Amar Dās. Tegh Bahādur, then barely two, was bathed with the holy water.

seasons of the year." The Sikhs of Delhi started coming in groups to see the Guru. They came chanting the holy songs and brought offerings with them.

According to the *Guru kīān Sākhīān*, Guru Har Krishan visited the emperor's court on Chet Sudī Naumī, 1721 BK/ March 25,1664. As says the *Mahimā Prakāsh*, the emperor had planned a trial. He had two large trays laid out for the Guru. One of these displayed ornaments, clothes and toys. The other had in it a holy man's cloak and cowl. Both were presented to Guru Har Krishan. He rejected the tray containing ornaments and clothes, and accepted the one containing the cloak. The emperor was convinced of his eminence. He thought he would invite him again and see him perform a miracle. Guru Har Krishan guessed what the emperor had in his mind. He told himself that he would not see his face again. He believed that no one should attempt a miracle and try to disturb the law of God. Guru Har Krishan knew how his father had punished Rām Rāi, his elder brother, for showing feats in Aurangzib's court.

The Rānī had devised her own test. She asked her husband, Jai Singh, to bring the Guru to the ladies' dwelling-house. The Guru accepted the invitation. At the entrance to the inner apartments of the palace, he was received by the Rājā's servants with due honour. As he stepped inside, the ladies, in their costly jewels and clothes, bowed in reverence. He walked past them acknowledging their greetings. As he came near one dressed modestly in a maid's coarse homespun, he stopped and said, "You are the Rānī. Why should you have dressed yourself in a maid's suit?" The Rānī bent her head in homage.

Suddenly one day Guru Har Krishan was taken ill with a fever. The fever turned out to be the beginning of an attack of smallpox. The Guru's tender body was ravaged by the disease. The Guru's mother, Mātā Sulakkhanī, became very sad. She said, "Son, you occupy the *gaddī* of Guru Nānak. You are the dispeller of the world's sorrows and sufferings. Your very sight removes the ailments of others. Why do you lie sick now?" Guru Har Krishan replied, "He who has taken this mortal frame must go through sickness and disease. Both happiness and suffering are part of life. What is ordained must

happen. This is what Guru Nānak taught. Whatever He does is His order. One must walk in the light of His command."

Guru Har Krishan had himself taken out of Rāja Jai Singh's house to a camp put up on the bank of the Jamunā. The Sikhs wondered why the Guru suffered thus. Why this darkness surrounding the sun itself? They were in despair and wondered who would take the *gaddī* after him. Guru Har Krishan, as says the *Srī Gur Pratāp Sūraj Granth*, instructed them in this manner: "*Gurgaddī*, Guru Nānak's throne, is eternal. It is everlasting and will command increasing honour. The Granth is the Lord of all. He who wants to see me, let him with faith and love see the Granth. So will he shed all his sins. He who would wish to speak with the Guru, let him read the Granth with devotion. He who practises its teachings will obtain all the four *padārathas*, or cherished objects of human life. He who has faith gains all. He who is without faith acquires but little. None in this world liveth forever. The body is mortal. In the Granth abides the Guru's spirit. Daily bow your head to it. So will you conquer your passions and attain liberation."

Tears filled the Sikhs' eyes as they listened to what sounded like the last words of the Guru.

Then Mother Sulakkhanī came forward. With tears in her eyes, she spoke, "How shall I live without thee, son? I was blessed when I came into this family married to the late Guru. I was blessed when you were born. Now I am cast into a bottomless ocean of sorrow. Who would be my rescuer? How does a fish live separated from water?" "The body is perishable," said Guru Har Krishan. "As you learn to have faith in God's Will, you will attain to realms sorrowless. Eternal peace will then be yours."

Mother Sulakkhanī's heart was awakened to the truth and she felt herself released from her worldly chains.

Guru Har Krishan was in a critical state. Yet he did not fail to carry out his important responsibility before he left the mortal world. In his last moments, he was able to nominate his successor. He asked for the ceremonial marks of succession to be fetched. But all he could say was: "Bābā Bakāle." He meant that the next Guru would be found in the town of Bakālā. The reference was unmistakably to Tegh Bahādur.

Old texts record that Tegh Bahādur took part in the battle of Kartārpur on April 26, 1635. This was the last major conflict his father, Guru Hargobind, had to engage in. According to the *Srī Gur Pratāp Sūraj Granth*, Tegh Bahādur, riding his horse, made bold sallies in all directions. Mātā Nānakī and her daughter-in-law watched his feats of arms from the top of their house. When word was sent to him to retire, he, like his brothers, answered that it was irreligious to turn one's back on the battlefield. Tegh Bahādur was then fourteen years old.

After the battle of Kartārpur, Guru Hargobind, Nānak VI, went to live at Kīratpur. For Tegh Bahādur this meant nine years of uninterrupted happiness in the company of his father. As was his wont, "he remained always saturated in the remembrance of God and spoke but little." When his time came near, Guru Hargobind asked Nānakī to go and live in the village of Bakālā. "That," said he, "is the place where my mother lived. In time you will witness the renown your son and your son's son attain." Upon Guru Hargobind's death his grandson, Har Rāi, ascended the Throne of Guru Nānak as the Seventh Guru. Mother Nānakī departed from Kīratpur with Tegh Bahādur and Gujarī to make her home at Bakālā.

Bakālā of those days is described by Sukkhā Singh in his *Gurbilās Dasvīn Pātshāhī* as a prosperous town with many beautiful pools, wells and *bāolīs*. For Mother Nānakī, it was not an unfamiliar place, for here lived her parents, Harī Chand and Hardeī. Tegh Bahādur was now remote from the main seat of Sikhism, yet he carried with him the ambience in which he had grown. He was the example of virtues the Gurus had taught. He had humility and compassion and a firmness of mind. He lived a strict and holy life and spent most of his time in meditation. Yet he was no recluse. He attended to family responsibilities. He went out riding and followed the chase. In the Sikh faith the temporal and the spiritual were not disjointed. This was amply attested in Guru Tegh Bahādur's life.

His residence in Bakālā was interrupted by a visit to Kīratpur. From there he set out, on June 13, 1656, towards the east. On this journey, he was accompanied by his mother and wife and the Sikhs such as Dayāl Dās, son of Māī Dās, Gavāl Dās, son of Chhote Mall Chhibbar, Sangat, son of

Binnā Uppal, and Sādhū Rām, son of Dharmā Khoslā. During his absence, Guru Har Rāi passed away at Kīratpur transferring his mantle to his young son, Har Krishan. Tegh Bahādur who returned to Delhi on March 21, 1664, called on Guru Har Krishan, then in the city summoned by Emperor Aurangzib, to condole with him upon his father's death. Thereafter, he travelled on to Bakālā, where his arrival was welcomed with illuminations. Sikhs swarmed from all sides to see him and Bakālā was in bustle once again.

Soon after Tegh Bahādur had left Delhi, Guru Har Krishan died alluding to him as his successor. According to the *Bhatt Vahī Talaudā*, Sikhs such as Diwān Dargāh Mall, son of Dwārkā Dās and grandson of Parāg Dās, Chaupat Rāi Chhibbar, Jethā, son of Māī Dās, Manī Rām, son of Māī Dās, Gurbakhsh, son of Bāghā, and others came from Delhi with Mātā Sulakkhnī, widow of Guru Har Rāi, to Bakālā formally to install him Guru. On the evidence of the *Mahimā Prakāsh*, Dwārkā Dās of the family of Guru Amar Dās, was also invited from Goindwāl. From Kīratpur came Dīp Chand and Nand Chand, sons of Sūraj Mall. Guru Tegh Bahādur's elder brother, Bhāī Gurdittā, great-great-grandson of Bābā Buddhā, performed the ceremony on August 11, 1664, by applying the *tilak* to his forehead.

Some pretenders had taken advantage of the ambiguity in the last words of Guru Har Krishan and set themselves up as Gurus at Bakālā. The most influential of them was Guru Tegh Bahādur's nephew, Dhīr Mall. The Sikhs were puzzled to see so many claimants and could not make out who the real Guru was. Makkhan Shāh, the wealthy Lubānā Sikh, arrived in search of the Guru. He walked from one street to another, making his obeisance and offering two gold *mohurs* to each of the "Gurus" he met, but obtained satisfaction from nowhere. Then he discovered that there lived in the village Tegh Bahādur, a saintly being who made no claims for himself.

Makkhan Shāh lost no time and made straight for the house which had been pointed out to him. Guru Tegh Bahādur sat rapt in contemplation. Makkhan Shāh bowed and placed in front of him the customary two gold *mohurs*. Guru Tegh Bahādur gave him his blessing, but said that his offering was considerably short of the promised five hundred gold coins.

Ablutions were repeated the following morning before Guru Hargobind left for Kartārpur. The family were left in Goindwāl on the persuasion of Bābā Sundar, great-grandson of Guru Amar Dās.

Upon his return to Amritsar, Guru Hargobind recalled the family from Goindwāl. As says the *Srī Gur Pratāp Sūraj Granth*, four of the Guru's sons greeted their father by touching his feet. The youngest, Tegh Bahādur, arrived carried on her arms by his sister, Bībī Vīro.

Tegh Bahādur was brought up in the most approved Sikh style. As a young boy, he was placed under the teaching of Bhāī Buddhā and Bhāī Gurdās. The former supervised his training in archery and horsemanship and the latter taught him the old classics. Tegh Bahādur made rapid progress and showed early promise of mastery in both the fields. He also gave evidence of a deeply mystical temperament by his prolonged spells of seclusion and contemplation. This strain of his genius is best expressed in his superbly sublime poetry preserved in the Guru Granth.

The father's favourable prophecies continued. Mother Nānakī, though pleased inwardly, often wondered how Tegh Bahādur, quiet and humble and devoid of all ambition, would attain the rank Guru Hargobind had predicted for him. But there was no doubt that he was his father's favourite and that mighty events awaited him.

To quote the *Srī Gur Pratāp Sūraj Granth*, "Tegh Bahādur visited Guru Hargobind but occasionally; yet he received more consideration than anyone else. Usually, he came but once in a month. He would step in softly with his eyes turned to the ground in modesty. Thus he would bow low to the Guru's feet. Guru Hargobind received his gentle son with words of affection and seated him sometimes by his side and sometimes lifted him up on to his knee....

"But Mother Nānakī's perplexity was not abated. She knew that her son, Tegh Bahādur, maintained no contact with the *masands*, nor did he supervise the household. One day she directly questioned Guru Hargobind why he treated Tegh Bahādur with such attention. The Guru answered, 'I shall unlock the mystery for you. Tegh Bahādur can suffer what none other can. His forbearance is unsurpassed. He is master

of many virtues. None else is there like him in the world. This is one reason which entitles him to acknowledgement. Second, a son will be born to him who will be mighty of limb and be the vanquisher of foe. He will take part in many a battle. He will excel in both valour and compassion. He will bring fame to the House of Guru Nānak, the world teacher.' "

The next several years were spent in Amritsar until it became time for Sūraj Mall to marry. Tegh Bahādur joined his brother's wedding party and, in the description of the *Gurbilās Chhevīn Pātshāhī,* he was escorted by the devout Bhāī Bidhī Chand. At Sūraj Mall's wedding which took place at Kartārpur on April 23, 1629, Bishan Kaur, one of the bride's guests, chose Tegh Bahādur for her own daughter. Confidentially she spoke to her husband, Lāl Chand, "Handsome beyond words is the Guru's son. Though barely eight years old, far excelling is his fortune. Our own daughter is five. We must act quickly and waste no time."

They took the proposal to Guru Hargobind. Bhāī Gurdās was sent to Tegh Bahādur whose answer was characteristic. He gently said that he would abide by the word of his father. The same day, he was affianced to Gujarī, daughter of Lāl Chand and Bishan Kaur. In Amritsar, Mother Nānakī received him with redoubled joy.

On February 4, 1633, took place the marriage of Tegh Bahādur. Relations and Sikhs congregated in Kartārpur from Goindwāl, Khadūr, Amritsar, Mandiālī, Batālā, Kāngar, Bhāī Rūpā, Mallā, and other places. Tegh Bahādur was dressed in yellow for the occasion. He wore a wreath on his forehead and an ornamented umbrella was unfolded over him. In deference to an old Punjabi scruple, the party dispensed with carriages and preferred to walk owing to the fact that the bride belonged to their own town.

In the words of Bhāī Santokh Singh, "Most splendid looked Tegh Bahādur. Both men and women felt fascinated by his looks. He was tall like his father. Handsome as the moon was his face. He was long of limb and broad-chested . . . and he walked with gentle, graceful steps." "Like bridegroom like bride," says the *Gurbilās Chhevīn Pātshāhī.* "Gujarī is by destiny made worthy of Tegh Bahādur in every way."

personal bonds between the Guru and his Sikhs. The *Mahimā Prakāsh* describes how lovingly Sikhs awaited Guru Tegh Bahādur in their homes: "Wherever there were Sikhs beloved of the Guru, there they had sworn in their hearts many offerings to him. Some had cushioned seats made for him hoping that he would favour them sometime with a visit. Some had marked out spaces and burnt incense on them in expectation of his footprints sanctifying them. Some had garments especially sewn for him. Their one fond wish was to offer these to their Guru with their own hands. Some had enlarged the doors of their houses in hope that the Perfect Guru would one day come. Some had gardens laid out. Some had their courts paved." Thus these travels were undertaken by Guru Tegh Bahādur to meet his Sikhs, to instruct the *sangats* in different parts of the country, to visit places of pilgrimage to redeem the masses from superstition and to proclaim far and wide the truth revealed by Guru Nānak.

Daggo lived at Dhamdhān. Preparations began for the journey which turned out to be a prolonged one. Guru Tegh Bahādur proceeded through towns such as Ropar, Banūr and Rājpurā. Further south, he reached a site near the modern city of Patiālā. Here lived the Muslim Nawāb, Saif-ud-Dīn Mahmūd, also known as Saif Khān, who had held office of governor of Agra under Aurangzib. He was a man with a religious disposition and was leading a secluded life during a period of retirement. He had heard stories of Guru Tegh Bahādur's charisms and devoutly desired to see him.

Guru Tegh Bahādur forestalled his heart's wish. On his arrival at Saifābād, he encamped close to the Nawāb's palace. Saif-ud-Dīn was deeply rejoiced to hear the news and immediately came to pay homage. He invited Guru Tegh Bahādur to stay in his garden. He was greatly fascinated by his spiritual deportment and served him with all his heart. The Guru was pleased and, to quote the *Sākhī Pothī*, he remarked, "You have set your thoughts on God. You and your descendants shall be blessed for twenty-one generations." The Nawāb once took Guru Tegh Bahādur, Mātā Nānakī and Mātā Gujarī into the inner apartments of his mansion to enable the ladies to meet them. As Guru Tegh Bahādur mounted his horse to depart, Saif-ud-Dīn, out of deference, held the stirrup.

At Dhamdhān, Guru Tegh Bahādur was received by Bhāī Daggo with exceeding joy. He put him up in the new house he had constructed. The Guru showered his blessings upon him: "For meeting me with presents, milk shall abound in thy house. Minister to the Sikhs and devotees, and remain with us during our stay in this place." Bhāī Pherū was another of the Sikhs who unremittingly served the Guru and the Sikhs. He was so thoroughly devoted to his duty that he never allowed himself leisure to open his big turban and comb his hair. Guru Tegh Bahādur conferred upon him the panegyric: "Clean is thy beard, Bhāī Pherū; durable is thy devotion; virtuous are thy actions; thou shalt be reckoned of consequence in the world. The Guru is a sacrifice unto thee, Bhāī Pherū!"

The festival of Divālī brought to Dhamdhān Sikhs from far-off places. They felt blessed by a sight of the Guru and faithfully received his instruction. On November 8, 1665, Guru Tegh Bahādur reached Delhi. Rānī Pushpā Devī of Amber was his host. Her family had reverenced the House of Guru Nānak since the days of the Sixth Guru, and her son, Kanwar Rām Singh, now attended upon the holy guest. Further journey lay through Mathura, Agra, Allahabad, Banaras and Sasaram. The Guru was drawn to Sasaram by the love of a Sikh, called Phaggo. Phaggo was convinced in his heart that the Guru would respond to his devotion and had, in anticipation of a visit, built a new house with a high entrance. His wish was that the Master should ride into the premises without having to dismount his horse. He cleaned the house every day and locked it, for he had vowed not to live in it until the Guru had visited it. Guru Tegh Bahādur answered his wish and, on reaching Sasaram, entered on horseback the house dedicated to him.

Guru Tegh Bahādur travelled on to Patna. There he spent the rainy season. At Patna was born his only son, then called Gobind Dās. But he had by that time left the city acceding to the wishes of *sangats* in remoter districts.

Dacca was the seat of an old Sikh *sangat*. Here the elderly mother of the local *masand*, Bulākī Dās, eagerly awaited the Guru's arrival. She had spun cotton with her own hands and made a dress for him. On reaching Dacca, Guru Tegh

Makkhan Shāh's heart leapt for joy to hear these words. He forthwith made good the difference. Then he ran upstairs and began shouting from the housetop: "*Guru lādho re, Guru lādho re* (I have found the Guru, I have found the Guru)."

Sikhs flocked to the house and felt deeply consoled to see their Guru. Makkhan Shāh's announcement dispirited the impostors. Yet nothing could assuage the envy of Dhīr Mall. His *masand*, Shīhān, fanned his jealousy. Dhīr Mall's men attacked Guru Tegh Bahādur's house and ransacked it as they willed, but the Guru did not stop them. When Makkhan Shāh retaliated and pillaged Dhīr Mall's house, he had everything returned to him. He restored to Dhīr Mall goods plundered from his own house, including the Granth Sāhib. Guru Tegh Bahādur taught his Sikhs the virtue of forgiveness. To quote the *Srī Gur Pratāp Sūraj Granth*, he said, "Forgiveness is the austerity most meritorious. Forgiveness is the best of charities. Forgiveness is equivalent to all the pilgrimages and ablutions. In forgiveness lies liberation. No other virtue parallels forgiveness. Forgiveness thou must learn."

The responsibility of instructing the Sikh community and guiding its affairs was now Guru Tegh Bahādur's. He was the focal point of veneration for the Sikhs. They came singly and in batches to seek spiritual solace and instruction. By his teaching and practice, he moulded their religious and social conscience. Connection was established with far-flung *sangats* through *masands* and the Guru's edicts or commandments, called *hukamnāmahs*, were issued from time to time.

Three successive visits were made to Kīratpur. On August 21, 1664, Guru Tegh Bahādur went there to condole with Bībī Rūp Kaur upon the passing away of her father, Guru Har Rāi, and of her brother, Guru Har Krishan. The second visit was on October 15, 1664, at the death on September 29, 1664, of Mātā Bassī, mother of Guru Har Rāi. A third visit concluded a fairly extensive journey through Mājhā, Mālwā and Bāngar districts of the Punjab. The first halt during this journey was at Amritsar, followed by halts at Tarn Tāran, Khadūr Sāhib and Goindwāl, all of long-standing sanctity in the Sikh tradition.

Crossing the Beās and Sutlej rivers, Guru Tegh Bahādur arrived in the Mālwā. He visited Zīrā and Mogā and reached

Daraulī. He then sojourned in the Lakkhī Jungle, a desolate and sandy tract comprising mainly present-day districts of Bhatindā and Farīdkot. According to the *Guru kīān Sākhīān*, Baisākhī of 1665 was celebrated at Sābo-kī-Talwandī, now known as Damdamā Sāhib. This journey took Guru Tegh Bahādur up to Dhamdhān, near Jīnd, from where he returned to Kīratpur.

On May 13, 1665, Guru Tegh Bahādur went to Bilāspur, farther up in the hills. This was to attend the mourning for Rājā Dīp Chand of Bilāspur. He was accompanied on this journey by his mother, Mātā Nānakī, Mātā Sulakkhnī, widow of Guru Har Rāī, Mātā Harījī, wife of Sūraj Mall, Bībī Rūp Kaur, daughter of Guru Har Rāi, and Dīp Chand and Nand Chand, sons of Sūraj Mall.

The Dowager Rānī Champā of Bilāspur offered to give the Guru a piece of land in her state. The Guru bought the site on payment of Rs 500. The land consisted of the villages of Lodhīpur, Mīānpur and Sahotā. Here on the mound of Mākhowāl, Guru Tegh Bahādur raised a new habitation. The ground was broken on June 19, 1665, by Bābā Gurdittā Randhāwā. *Karāhprasād* was distributed after the ceremonies. The new village was named after Mother Nānakī. Chakk Nānakī later became famous as Anandpur.

Like his predecessors since the days of Guru Hargobind, Guru Tegh Bahādur maintained the marks of worldly dignity. But he himself lived austerely. Sikh documents, or any other, make no mention of a clash with the ruling power having occurred during his time. Yet by his teaching and by his prolonged travels across the country, he created a new energy and environment for Sikh living. He was especially sensitive to the people's suffering and taught them to be fearless. One of his *slokas* or couplets reads: "*Bhai kāhū kau det nainh nainh bhai mānat ān, kahu Nānak sunu re rmanā giānī tāhi bakhān* (Sayeth Nānak, he who holds none in his fear, nor is afraid of anyone, acknowledge him alone as a man of true wisdom)." From Guru Tegh Bahādur's leadership, Sikhs imbibed further unity and self-reliance.

One day, at Chakk Nānakī, Guru Tegh Bahādur told his minister, Dargāh Mall, that he must go and meet his Sikh, Bhāī Daggo. Old texts relate many touching stories of close

he issued a rescript to all provincial governors "to destroy with a willing hand the schools and temples of the infidels and put an entire stop to their religious practices and teaching." Some of the most sacred and important shrines of the Hindus such as the second temple of Somnāth, the Vishvanāth temple of Banaras and the Keshavrāi temple of Mathura were destroyed. Among the many repressive edicts issued against non-Muslims was one prohibiting all Hindus, with the exception of Rajputs, from riding *pālkīs*, elephants or thorough-bred horses and from carrying arms.

The emperor's aim was to suppress faiths other than the Islamic, and he did not flinch from making forcible conversions. The experiment was first tried in Kashmir. The local viceroy, Iftikhār Khān (1671-75), carried out the policy vigorously and set about converting Kashmiris by the sword. To the helpless people pressed by the juggernaut of Mughal persecution, Anandpur promised a hope, and thither repaired a group of them to narrate their sad story to Guru Tegh Bahādur and seek his help. This is how P.N.K. Bamzai describes the event in his book *A History of Kashmir*:

> Iftikhar Khan . . . was using force to convert the Pandits in Kashmir to Islam. Some pious men among the Pandits then met and decided to go to Amarnath and invoke the mercy of Siva there for deliverance from the tyrannies of the bigot. At the Amarnath cave, one of the Pandits saw Lord Siva in a dream Who told him to go to Tegh Bahadur, the Ninth Sikh Guru, in the Punjab and ask for his help to save the Hindu religion. He spoke to his companions about the revelation. About 500 proceeded to Anandpur where Guru Tegh Bahadur was living.

They—sixteen in number according to the *Bhatt Vahī Talaudā* and about 500 according to Bamzai — reached Anandpur on May 25, 1675, led by Kirpā Rām Datt of Mattan, who had been tutor in earlier days to Guru Tegh Bahādur's son, Gobind Dās, and who after the Khālsā baptism took the name of Kirpā Singh and died a martyr in the battle of Chamkaur. They represented their woes to the Guru. In the words of Koer Singh's *Gurbilās Pātshāhī 10*, they submitted: "We suffer great atrocities, Master! Sacred threads (*janeūs*) are forcibly taken off our persons. Kine are killed. *Janeūs*,

a maund-and-a-quarter in weight, are snapped in a single day."

As Guru Tegh Bahādur sat, rapt in thought, young Gobind Dās happened to come along with his playmates. Seeing his father in such a pensive mood, he stopped and asked why he looked so deeply preoccupied.

To quote again the *Gurbilās Pātshāhī 10*, "The Guru answered: 'Grave are the burdens the earth carries. She will be redeemed only if a truly worthy person comes forward to sacrifice his head. Distress will then be expunged and happiness ushered in'."

"None could be worthier than yourself for such a noble act," remarked Gobind Dās in his innocent manner.

Guru Tegh Bahādur was pleased to hear this brave answer and receive such spontaneous confirmation from his young son, then barely nine, of his resolution to lay down his life to uphold the people's right to practise the creed they professed. He asked his visitors to go and tell the emperor that, if he [Guru Tegh Bahādur] was converted, they would all voluntarily accept Islam.

Resolved to court execution and ransom justice, Guru Tegh Bahādur set out from Anandpur. He made a prayer to Akālpurkh to bestow on him the gift of martyrdom and took leave of his family and his devoted Sikhs. Orders for his arrest were issued by Aurangzib as soon as he received reports of his declared intention. The common belief so far has been that the arrest was made at Agra from where the Guru was taken to Delhi under heavy escort. But recent researches carried out by Giānī Garjā Singh, who has brought to light Bhatt Vahī materials, demonstrate that the arrest took place at Malikpur almost immediately after Guru Tegh Bahādur had left Anandpur. The entry in the *Bhatt Vahī Multānī Sindhī*, as recorded by Garjā Singh, reads:

> *Gurū Tegh Bahādur mahilā naumā . . . ko Nūr Muhammad Khān Mirzā, chaukī Ropar vāle ne, sāl satrān sai battīs Sāvan pravishte bārān ke dihun gām Malikpur Ranghrān, parganah Ghanaulā, se pakar ke Sirhind men puchāiyā, gailo Dīwān Matī Dās, Satī Dās bete Hīrā Mall Chhibbar ke, Dyāl Dās betā Māī Dās kā pakrā āiyā. Chār mās Bassī Pathānān bandī khāne band rahe, dushtān Gurūjī ko ghanā kasht dīyā. Gurūjī ne bhāne ko mānā.*

Bahādur went straight to where she lived. For the old woman, this was like a dream become reality. She felt rejoiced to seat the Guru on the *dīvān* she had kept for him and to present him with the dress she had made. The entire *sangat* came to see the Guru singing the sacred *sabads*. Guru Tegh Bahādur greeted them by calling Dacca "the citadel of Sikhism." He advised them to build a new *dharamsālā*, assemble in it for *kīrtan* and celebrate the holy festivals. "Thus will you be liberated; thus will your sorrows be cancelled."

Rājā Rām Singh, of Amber, who had been sent on January 6, 1668, from Delhi by Aurangzib with an expedition to Assam, overtook Guru Tegh Bahādur in Dacca. His mother, Pushpā Devī, had exhorted him to seek the Guru's help in his enterprise. The Rājā, himself a devoted disciple, was pleased to see Guru Tegh Bahādur. He felt doubly blessed when the Guru accepted his entreaty to accompany him on the campaign. Towards the close of 1668, they set out for Assam, crossed the Brahmputra and reached Dhūbrī, which had also been visited by Guru Nānak during his travels in eastern India. Guru Tegh Bahādur marked out the spot where the First Guru had sat. People thronged to see him. A local chieftain, Rājā Rām, came to seek blessing for a son. His wish was fulfilled and, as Sikh records tell, the son, named Ratan Rāi, became a disciple and visited Guru Gobind Singh at Anandpur with presents.

Rājā Rām Singh who was encamped at some distance from Guru Tegh Bahādur clashed with the Ahom ruler, Chakradhwaj Singh. The issue remained undecided and, according to Sikh chronicles, the Guru brought about peace between the warring forces. Guru Tegh Bahādur travelled as far as Hājo: a modern researcher traces the name of a nearby hillock, Teghpur or Tegh Parbat, to his visit.

Hājo was the farthest Guru Tegh Bahādur travelled. The homeward journey began late in 1669. It was faster than the outward journey. The longest halt was at Patna where the Guru re-joined his family and saw for the first time his son, Gobind Dās. At parting, the Guru instructed the family to return to the Punjab and await his arrival at Lakhnaur, near Ambālā. He himself proceeded to Delhi. In the entourage

on this journey was his faithful Muslim follower, Nawāb Saif Khān.

On the evidence of the *Bhatt Vahī Talaudā*, Guru Tegh Bahādur arrived in Delhi on June 20, 1670. He put up in the *dharamsālā* of Bhāī Kalyānā where disciples and followers flocked in large numbers to obtain his blessing. Rānī Pushpā Devī came along with her daughter-in-law and felt relieved of her anxiety to hear of the well-being of her son, Rājā Rām Singh.

Guru Tegh Bahādur's son, Gobind Dās, had reached Lakhnaur in the care of his mother and grandmother. In this village lived Mehar Chand, Mātā Gujarī's brother. Guru Tegh Bahādur arrived there from Delhi. A happy ceremony he witnessed was the offerings made to Gobind Dās by his uncle. These included an emerald-green turban which young Gobind Dās spun round his head for the occasion.

The family was sent to Chakk Nānakī, but Guru Tegh Bahādur spent some more time travelling in the Mālwā. According to the *Guru kīān Sākhīān*, he visited Saifābād, Lahal, Lang, Mūlowāl, Sekhā and Thīkrīwālā, before he arrived at Mallā to see his sister, Bībī Vīro. He crossed the Sutlej to visit Kartārpur and the Beās to visit his favourite Bābā Bakālā. Eventually, he reached Chakk Nānakī just before the Baisākhī festival of 1672.

The Delhi emperor's bigotry was causing widespread suffering in the country. A pious man in his personal life, Aurangzib was an orthodox Muslim and cherished the ambition of purging India of the infidels and making it a land "fit for Islam." During his viceroyalty of Gujarat, he had many Hindu shrines in the province demolished and had desecrated the temple of Chintaman in Ahmedabad, finally converting the building into a mosque. He had waded through a river of blood to reach the throne and had imprisoned his father and killed his own brothers. The consciousness of this guilt only sharpened his religious prejudice, and it drove him to the harshest measures he could devise against the non-Muslim population. By this policy he wished to please the Muslim orthodoxy and win reprieve for the crimes he had committed to gain the crown. For the first ten years of his reign, he did not feel strong enough to take any drastic steps, but in 1669

> Guru Tegh Bahādur, the Ninth Guru . . . was arrested by Nūr Muhammad Khān Mirzā, of the Ropar police post, on the 12th of Savan, 1732/July 12, 1675, at village Malikpur Ranghrān, *parganah* Ghanaulā, and sent to Sirhind. With him were arrested Dīwān Matī Dās and Satī Dās, sons of Hīrā Mall Chhibbar, and Dayāl Dās, son of Māī Dās. For four months they were kept in custody at Bassī Pathānān. The tyrants tortured the Guru a great deal. The Guru accepted God's Will.

The Malikpur arrest is corroborated by Muhammad Ehsān Ijād—a source quoted by William Irvine in his book *Later Mughals* (p. 79 fn.) and by a Sikh chronicler, Kesar Singh Chhibbar, in his *Bansāvalīnāmā*.

On the authority of the Bhatt Vahī, Guru Tegh Bahādur departed from Chakk Nānakī (Anandpur) on July 11, 1675. He had, on July 8, 1675, nominated his son Gobind Dās as his spiritual successor and conferred on him the marks of Guruship. On July 12, he, along with his Sikhs, was taken into custody by Nūr Muhammad Khān of the Ropar police post at the village of Malikpur Ranghrān, in Ghanaulā *parganah*, and sent to Sirhind the following day. The Faujdār of Sirhind, Dilāwar Khān, ordered him to be detained at Bassī Pathānān and reported the news to the emperor. For over three months, he was kept in gaol and given the harshest treatment. He was then cast into an iron cage and taken to Delhi where he arrived on November 4, 1675.

Guru Tegh Bahādur was put in chains and ordered to be tortured until he would accept Islam. But neither physical chastisement nor any worldly allurement could have any effect on him. When he could not be persuaded to abandon his faith, he was asked to perform some miracle to prove the divinity of his mission. This also he declined, saying that it was never right to try to intervene in the Will of God.

The Guru's tormentors had already given evidence of their cruel intentions by tying Bhāī Matī Dās, his devoted follower, between two pillars and splitting his body into two by sawing it from head downwards. Another Sikh, Bhāī Dyālā, was thrown into a cauldron of boiling water. Bhāī Satī Dās was burnt to death wrapped in cotton wool. Guru Tegh Bahādur was himself beheaded in public in the Chāndnī Chowk on November 11, 1675. The executioner was astonished at the

composure with which he met his deadly sword. The Guru bore no hate or anger in his heart, but sat absorbed in prayer as the executioner prepared to strike.

The mutilated body of Guru Tegh Bahādur was left in Chāndnī Chowk unattended, and none dared claim it for fear of Mughal reprisal. In the night there came a storm. This was Nature's way of manifesting her sadness over the sorrowful event and of providing the Sikhs with cover to escape with the bodily remains. Bhāī Jaitā, Bhāī Gurbakhsh and others had witnessed with their own eyes what had happened. They told other Sikhs in Dilwālī mohallā and one by one they came and assembled in the house of Bhāī Nānū. There they sat far into the evening listening to the woeful narration and making plans to rescue the body. Lakkhī Shāh Lubānā's caravan of bullock-carts had arrived on that day from Nārnaul carrying lime. Jaitā, Nānū, Āgyā and Udā hid themselves in the wagons near the Fort and reached the Kotwālī, in Chāndnī Chowk. They lifted the severed head and took it to Bhāī Jaitā's house in Dilwālī mohallā, where it was kept for the night.

Lakkhī Shāh, helped by his son Nagāhīā and others, placed the headless trunk in one of his carts and carried it off to his home. Since open cremation would not have been possible, the Lubānā Sikh set fire to his house, burning with it the body of the martyred Guru. The spot is now the site of Gurdwārā Rikābganj.

The bodies of Bhāī Matī Dās, Bhāī Satī Dās and Bhāī Dyālā were removed by the Sikhs and cremated on the bank of the Jamunā, near the spot consecrated to Bhāī Gurdittā, who had passed away on the very day of Guru Tegh Bahādur's martyrdom. Bhāī Jaitā, with his most sacred but sorrowful possession, made his way to Anandpur accomplishing the hazardous journey as quickly as he could. The rocks of the hills around Anandpur must have melted to see the dust-laden head of its founder. Mātā Gujarī and the Sikhs were overcome by grief. Guru Gobind Singh, no more than nine years of age, displayed matchless fortitude and calmness. He affectionately greeted Bhāī Jaitā and exalted his whole tribe by conferring on it the blessing: "*Ranghrete Gur ke bete*, i.e. Ranghretās are the Guru's own sons."

Guru Gobind Singh performed the obsequies with dignity and reverence on November 16, 1675. "A pyre of sandalwood was constructed and *attar* of roses sprinkled on the head which the young Guru took and solemnly placed on the pyre. He then repeated the preamble of the *Japujī*, the morning prayer of the Sikhs, and ignited the pyre with his own hands. While the head was being cremated, the Sikh congregation sang hymns of the Guru. They called to memory and spoke of Guru Tegh Bahādur's philanthropic and self-sacrificing deeds. The *Sohilā*, the last of the Sikhs' five daily prayers, was then read and *karāhprasād* distributed. When Guru Gobind Singh reached home, he caused the reading of the Gurus' hymns to be begun, and this was continued for ten days, when alms were freely distributed."

Lakkhī Shāh and other Sikhs came from Delhi with the sacred remains. Guru Gobind Singh received them with honour. Lakkhī Shāh narrated the Delhi events and the entire *sangat* was overwhelmed with emotion. "Hail! Guru Tegh Bahādur, *Dharma-dī-Chādar*, i.e. the sheet or protector of *dharma*," it proclaimed with one voice.

Guru Gobind Singh has left a written record of the martyrdom. He says in his *Bachitra Nātak*:

> He protected their *tilak* and *janeū*;
> In this *kali* age, he performed a grand deed;
> He made the supreme sacrifice for the sake of the men of faith.
> He gave his head,
> but uttered not a groan.
> This martyrdom he endured to uphold righteousness.
> He gave his head, but displayed not his charism.
> Men of God will be ashamed
> To perform tricks like charlatans.
> Casting off his bodily vesture to the suzerain of Delhi,
> He departed to Realms Divine.
> A deed like Tegh Bahādur's none had dared before.
> The world was enwrapped in mourning.
> Laments of grief filled the land of the mortals;
> In the sphere of the gods rang
> shouts of adoration.

This is first-hand testimony. This is also an apt estimate

of Guru Tegh Bahādur's sacrifice. Several points of significance emerge. First, the temporal setting of the martyrdom. It was a time of utter moral chaos, of imposition and oppression. Darkness of the age of *kali* prevailed. Humanitarian values of justice and tolerance were at a discount. Society was severely fragmented and debilitated. It had lost its ardour for united action and resistance, and submitted inertly to tyranny and injustice. The *tilak* and the *janeū*, symbols of upper-caste Hinduism, were in jeopardy. This was because of the bigotry of the ruling authority. Guru Tegh Bahādur was not a votary of these religious signs. Yet he staked his life to defend the right of those who believed in them. Implicit in this act were his boundless sympathy for the oppressed and his concern to secure the people the freedom of belief. Protection of *tilak* and *janeū* meant the protection of the right of everyone to practise his religion unhindered. It involved the larger issues of human rights and freedom of conscience. Guru Tegh Bahādur's protest was against the State's interference with the individual's duty towards his faith. It meant declaring that the State had no authority over the individual's conscience and that any attempt to create a unitary, monolithic society must be resisted. It was a reiteration of the Sikh belief in a liberal and ethical social order and of the Sikh principles of tolerance and acceptance of diversity of faith and practice.

The martyrdom was no small happening. It was something of immense magnitude, of immense consequence. A most sensitive and comprehensive genius of the age undertook to answer the challenge of the time with all his moral strength. He brought to his response spiritual insight and discipline of the highest order, a living experience which bespoke love, compassion and humility and an inheritance descending from Guru Nānak, symbolizing the ideals of faith, self-giving service and freedom. The choice was deliberately made. It was no passive submission, but a positive decision to confront an existing situation.

As Guru Tegh Bahādur set out from Anandpur, he knew that he was going to Delhi to lay down his life. The final decision to court suffering and death was made when the group of Kashmiri Brahmans met him and narrated their melancholy tale. The idea must have already taken root in his mind, for

he had himself witnessed the distress of the people. His heart was deeply moved by it and the solution he eventually devised must have been in meditation for some time. The Kashmiris' visit proved decisive. This firmly contemplated resolution by a pious and noble soul to make the supreme sacrifice to secure the people a just and humane treatment was of great moment. The cruel execution faced with a rare voluntariness and equanimity was a colossal event in the history of mankind. It was a telling assertion of the sovereignty of the human spirit and of the moral principle.

Guru Tegh Bahādur allowed himself to be beheaded without uttering a groan. He remained wholly composed in face of the executioner's blow. This was no stoic fortitude, but a decided gesture to force a moral issue. There was no rancour or ill will towards anyone in the Guru's heart. He made the sacrifice for the sake of holy men. Guru Gobind Singh's words have a wider meaning and refer to all men concerned about preserving their worship and their way of life. This could also be a historical allusion to the Kashmiri Brahmans who had sought Guru Tegh Bahādur's help in their desperate state. The Guru performed this marvellous deed to defend *dharma*, to defend the universal values of truth, equality and tolerance. The deed of martyrdom had its immediate implications as well as an eternal moral. It marked the disavowal of the prevailing oppression and bigotry and indicated the way to resistance. It pointed to a new future for man—for a society which would be free from tyranny and intolerance.

Guru Tegh Bahādur preferred death by the executioner's axe to displaying his charism. As history records, he was asked by his tormentors to show a miracle to prove his holiness. He might thereby have saved his life, but he refused. Miracle was termed a misdeed, a charlatan's meretricious sport, or mere histrionics. This was something men of God would shun. They would be ashamed to indulge in such trickery. Miracle was absolutely alien to Guru Tegh Bahādur's spiritual vision. It was equally irrelevant to the existential decision he had made. The question was not of saving his life, but of fulfilling his resolve deliberately made to embrace a martyr's death in pursuit of his declared objective.

Casting off his bodily vesture to the suzerain of Delhi,

Guru Tegh Bahādur departed to Realms Divine. In the image in Guru Gobind Singh's original Braj, the Guru broke the potsherd of his body on the head of the sovereign of Delhi. The words are few, but pregnant: "*Thīkar phor dilīs sir prabh pur kīā piyān.*" The emperor's responsibility for this episode is evident. His policies had created the situation in which Guru Tegh Bahādur had to offer himself for the ultimate sacrifice. It was under the emperor's orders that he was arrested. Under imperial fiat, the execution took place. The fact is authenticated from Guru Gobind Singh's testimony. The line also illustrates how light Guru Tegh Bahādur made of the imperial authority. Further, sacrificing the body for high ideals was considered but a trifling charge. It was like jettisoning a broken piece of pottery.

Guru Gobind Singh perceived the uniqueness of the event. The martyrdom had certain singular elements. Its voluntariness, in the first instance. Guru Tegh Bahādur chose the course of his own accord. This was in no manner his compulsion. What impelled him to take his decision was the compassion of his soul. Sacrificing his own life was his prescription for remedying the prevalent malaise. He invited the trial upon himself to redeem the people's suffering and left Anandpur to go to the imperial capital determined to lay down his life. The choice was his own, the consequence of no escapist ethic but of a positive will.

Second, the religious symbols which were Guru Tegh Bahādur's immediate concern did not belong to his own tradition. These had, in fact, been rejected in the Sikh system. Yet Guru Tegh Bahādur opted to defend these at the cost of his life. The protection of these symbols became for him an issue of the utmost moral and social significance. In this cause he willingly suffered death. To stand up for the rights of others and to go to the extent of sacrificing one's life to secure them the freedom of conscience, as did Guru Tegh Bahādur, was a deeply humanitarian act, unprecedented in history. To quote Bhāī Santokh Singh:

> Who like him there ever was in the world,
> Who sacrificed his head for the others' sake?

Guru Tegh Bahādur's martyrdom was a superb act of self-giving, of complete reliance on God's Will. In the political milieu of India of that time it was an act of extreme courage. The emperor's authority was unlimited and unchallengeable. The country never before had the experience of a more powerful rule. Force prevailed. Society was utterly listless and moribund. People docilely suffered suppression. Passivity had taken hold of their souls. No protest of any kind was heard anywhere in the kingdom. For Guru Tegh Bahādur to confront the might of the rulers was a miracle in itself. His resolution was nobly made, motivated by pure philanthropy. From his high idealism and his life—deeply spiritual, chaste and consecrated, always giving and never seeking anything for itself—it acquired a moral potency which made his martyrdom a unique event in the annals of man. This was, as said Guru Gobind Singh, a deed applauded by the gods themselves.

CHAPTER VI

THE SACRAMENT OF STEEL

Guru Gobind Singh was the last of the ten Sikh Gurus. He was born on December 22, 1666, at Patna, in Bihar. Among those who travelled to the city upon hearing the happy news was Syed Bhīkhan Shāh, a pious Muslim saint. As the story goes, he held out upon his palms two earthen vessels when he saw the child. The latter touched both. By this Bhīkban Shāh judged that he would treat all, Hindus and Muslims, alike.

Gobind Singh lived at Patna until he was five. Then he was taken to Anandpur. He was nine when his father, Guru Tegh Bahādur, was martyred in Delhi. At that young age, he inherited the responsibility of guiding the Sikh faith and fulfilling the teaching of Guru Nānak. In the midst of his engagement with the concerns of the community, he gave full attention to the mastery of physical skills and literary accomplishment. He had grown into a comely youth, spare, lithe of limb and energetic. His versatility was amazing, and he went through his arduous daily programme with inexhaustible vitality. He rose well before dawn and sat in contemplation of the Eternal One. He then came to the morning assembly where he listened to the holy hymns being sung by the musicians and gave expositions of the sacred word. The rest of the day was spent in recitations of heroic poetry, drills and athletic competitions and in ministering to the needs and problems of the disciples. The evening assembly was followed by common board and concourses far into the night at which news of the government's excesses was discussed and stories were narrated of the preceding Gurus and of the Sikhs of their times.

As a result of his assiduous training and practice, Guru Gobind Singh gained unique facility in the use of arms. He showed similar prowess at learning. Besides Punjabi, he gained proficiency in Sanskrit, Braj and Persian. He read the old classics and acquired extensive knowledge of Sanskrit and Persian

lore. He had a natural genius for poetic composition. The total verse he wrote would fill a lifetime of exclusive dedication to the Muse. He bore a highly artistic and elegant hand at Gurmukhī calligraphy specimens of which are fortunately preserved on the leaves of some copies of the Holy Book of his time and in the form of his inscriptions on several of his *hukamnāmahs* which have come down to us.

At the age of eleven, Guru Gobind Singh was married to Jītojī, daughter of Harjas, a resident of Lahore. In contravention of the time-honoured custom, he refused to go to distant Lahore for the wedding. He raised instead a small habitation near Anandpur and called it Lahore. His disciples and followers thronged the place. Harjas came with his family and the nuptial ceremonies were performed amidst much jubilation.

Guru Gobind Singh received an invitation from Rājā Medinī Prakāsh of Sirmūr to visit him at Nāhan, his capital, which had a cool climate and abounded in game. Leaving an adequate guard at Anandpur and beating the big drum, Ranjīt Nagārā, to proclaim his departure, Guru Gobind Singh set out towards Nāhan. He halted at Kīratpur where he visited the shrine of his grandfather, Guru Hargobind. As he reached the vicinity of Nāhan (April 14, 1685), the Rājā came out to greet him and considered himself fortunate in having him as his guest. He took him to his palace and looked after him and his Sikhs in a most hospitable manner.

It was not the intention of Guru Gobind Singh to stay as the Rājā's guest for long. While out in pursuit of chase one day, he was fascinated by the natural scenery of a spot on the margin of the Jamunā. The place was within his host's territory, forty-two kilometres from his capital. Guru Gobind Singh set up his camp on that site and laid, on April 29, 1685, the foundation of a fortress. Diwān Nand Chand Sanghā of Daraulī performed the *ardās* and Rām Koer, a descendant of Bhāī Buddhā, broke the ground. Guru Gobind Singh named the place Pāontā, from the *pāv* or foot of his horse implanted on this spot when it had instantly attracted his attention.

The years spent in the quiet of Pāontā were the most creative and significant. Apart from the religious and martial training of his followers, Guru Gobind Singh contemplated deeply and long on the state of the people. It was in Pāontā that his

grand design for recovery and renovation took shape in his mind. His poetic intuition found exuberant expression, and he created verse which is notable for its sublimity of style, mystical ardour and energy. His object was two-fold: to sing praises of the Timeless and to infuse new vigour into the limp mass of people. His compositions were most appropriately adapted to these purposes. Rarely has poetry in any tongue recaptured the transcendent vision in such personal terms or inspired such a spirit of courage and heroism.

In this poetry, Guru Gobind Singh created a new metaphor—the metaphor of the sword. The sword was the symbol of Akāl Himself. God was described as *Sarbloh*, i.e. All-Steel. This image was intended to give a new orientation to the minds of men given to passivity. They needed a new vocabulary and a new principle of faith. This Guru Gobind Singh provided by coining the new figure. At the beginning of his autobiographical *Bachitra Nātak*, he used the term Sword for the Transcendent and said:

> I bow with love and devotion to the Holy Sword,
> Assist me that I may be able to complete this work.

Then follows a ringing invocation to the sword. The diction, a variety of Prakrit, is so powerful and it produces the clangorous rhythm of clashing swords with such force that the verse may be quoted in the original:

> *Khaga khanda bihandam khala dala khandam*
> *ati ran mandam bara bandam.*
> *Bhuja danda akhandam tej prachandam*
> *joti amandam bhānu prabham.*
> *Sukha santā karnam durmati darnam*
> *kilbikh harnam asi sarnam.*
> *Jai jai jag kāran sristi ubāran*
> *mama pratipāran jai tegham.*
> Thou art the subduer of kingdoms,
> The destroyer of the armies of the wicked.
> In the battlefield Thou adornest the brave.
> Thy arm is infrangible, Thy brightness refulgent,
> Thy radiance and splendour dazzle like the sun.
> Thou bestowest happiness on the good,
> Thou terrifiest the evil, thou scatterest sinners.
> I seek thy protection.

Hail! hail to the creator of the world,
The saviour of creation, my cherisher,
Hail to thee, O Sword!

God and Sword became interchangeable terms. The preamble to the Sikh *ardās*, which is of Guru Gobind Singh's composition, begins with the words: "Having first remembered the Sword, meditate on Guru Nānak...."

When Guru Gobind Singh referred to God as Sarbloh or Sword, he was not oblivious of His characteristics of love and compassion. A couplet in his *Jāp Sāhib* reads:

I bow to Thee, Lord, Who art the wielder of the
sword!
I bow to Thee, Lord, Who art the possessor
of arms!
I bow to Thee, Lord, Who knowest the
ultimate secret!
I bow to Thee, Lord, Who lovest the world
like a mother!

God is symbolized in the weapons of war. He is presented as the Punisher of the Evil and the Destroyer of the Tyrant. The benevolent aspect is simultaneously and equally forcefully emphasized and He is invoked as the Fountain-head of Mercy, the Kinsman of the Poor and the Bestower of Felicity. This fusion of the devotional and the martial, of the spiritual and the heroic was the most important feature of the philosophy of Guru Gobind Singh and of his career as a spiritual leader and harbinger of a revolutionary impulse.

A brave death on the field of battle for a holy cause was set out as a noble and worthy end. Thus does Guru Gobind Singh supplicate God in one of his hymns:

Grant unto me this boon, O Lord,
That I may never be deterred
from doing good deeds.
I should have no fear of the enemy
when I go to battle,
And turn victory decidedly to my side.
In my mind there is but one desire
That I may ever be singing Thy praises.
And, when the time comes, I should die
Fighting in the thick of action.

All of Guru Gobind Singh's works reveal the power of his poetic imagination and mystical intuition. They reveal also the amazing range of his learning and knowledge in diverse fields such as mythology, metaphysics, astronomy, human psychology, geography, botany, *āyurveda* and warfare. He had a command of several languages such as Braj, Avadhi, Arabic, Persian and Punjabi. His compositions were mostly in Braj which then enjoyed vogue as the language of literary expression. He possessed an uncanny mastery over the magic of words and used them with natural ease to render a variety of moods, scenes and sounds. There was the harmony of the spheres in his verse as well as the irresistible flow of hill rivulets and the graceful sweep of a galloping steed. He adopted many traditional moulds and measures, but his own prosodic innovations were prodigious. Likewise, he created myriads of original images and similes to lend embellishment and meaning to his verse. For its loftiness of tone, resonant timbre and opulence of symbolism, Guru Gobind Singh's poetry remains unmatched. It inspired vast numbers of people and revivified and enriched the Indian literary tradition.

Poetry as such was not his aim. For him it was a means of revealing the divine principle and concretizing the personal vision of the Supreme Being that had been vouchsafed to him. Through his poetry he preached love and equality, and a strictly ethical and moral code of conduct. He preached the worship of the One Supreme Being, deprecating idolatry and superstitious beliefs and observances. The glorification of the sword itself was to secure fulfilment of God's justice. The sword was never a symbol of aggression, and it was never used for self-aggrandizement. It stood for righteous and brave action for the protection of truth and virtue. It was the emblem of manliness and self-respect and was to be used only in self-defence, as a last resort. For Guru Gobind Singh said:

> When all other means have failed,
> It is but righteous to take to the sword.

The tranquil, poesy-laden atmosphere of Pāontā was disturbed by an unnecessary conflict forced upon Guru Gobind Singh. Emperor Aurangzib was too far away, occupied with

his campaigns in the South, to take much notice of affairs in other parts of the country. Nevertheless, his feudal vassals, the hill chieftains, had always resented the Guru's presence in their midst. They were especially averse to the way the four castes mingled in the Sikh order. Led by Rājā Fateh Shāh of Srīnagar (Garhwāl) and others, they plotted together to make an attack on Pāontā. For the Guru, it was a mystery why they should have done so, for, in his *Bachitra Nātak*, he said that Rājā Fateh Shāh "raged and fought with me purposelessly."

Guru Gobind Singh met the army eleven kilometres north-east of Pāontā, at a place called Bhangānī. The eminence Guru Gobind Singh had chosen was between the Jamunā and its tributary, the Girī. It gave him advantage in strategy. The battle raged fiercely as the two armies faced each other. Guru Gobind Singh's Sikhs, unused to the ways of war, surpassed their trained and professional adversaries in courage and dexterity. This gave them confidence in their arms and the mountain monarchs, who had the worst of the conflict, learnt to respect their power. Among those who fell in action were Sango Shāh and Jīt Mall, cousins of Guru Gobind Singh, and Hathī Chand, brother of Manī Rām. A Sikh who fought with extraordinary valour was Lāl Chand. A confectioner by profession and unused to wielding a sword, he, as says the *Srī Gur Pratāp Sūraj Granth*, obtained Guru Gobind Singh's permission and flung into the action. He got the better of the veteran Pathan soldier, Mīr Khān, and slew him on the spot with his sword. The battle of Bhangānī took place on September 18, 1688. Soon thereafter Guru Gobind Singh left for Anandpur.

Baisākhī at Anandpur had always been an occasion for joyous celebrations. For the festival in 1699, Guru Gobind Singh had ordered special preparations to be made. Messages were issued to the Sikhs to come in full strength, wearing arms and maintaining their beards and hair inviolate. Elaborate arrangements were made at Anandpur for the reception of the visitors. The Guru remained absorbed for long intervals and the Sikhs noticed on his face the reflection of his deep meditations. He seemed to be occupied with an unfathomable inner wonder and mystery. The air in Anandpur was tense with anticipation. Everyone went about his task slightly subdued by the self-consciousness of the moment. A stillness prevailed

where used to be so much of energetic fun and gaiety—a stillness which prefigured the birth of a momentous event.

As the Baisākhī day approached, Anandpur started humming with visitors. On the day of the festival (March 30), Guru Gobind Singh, as usual, rose early, and sat in meditation. He then appeared before the *sangat*, who hailed him with shouts of greetings. Bhāī Manī Rām gave exposition of a *sabad* from the Holy Book. Guru Gobind Singh then stood before the assembly with his sword unsheathed and spoke: "My sword wants today a head. Let any one of my true Sikhs come forward. Isn't there a Sikh of mine who would sacrifice his life for his Guru and the *dharma*?"

His words numbed the audience. They did not know what the Guru meant and gazed in awed silence until he spoke again. Now confusion turned into fear. For the third time Guru Gobind Singh repeated his call. Dayā Rām, a Sobtī Khatrī of Lahore, arose and said with humility, "My head is at thy disposal, my True Lord. There could be no greater gain than dying under thy sword." He walked behind the Guru to a tent near by. The Guru returned with his sword dripping blood, and demanded another head. This was more than many could endure. People started leaving the place. Some of them went to complain to the Guru's mother. But Dharam Dās, a Jat of Hastināpur, stood up and said with folded hands, "Thy humble servant offers himself, Great Lord! He had consecrated his head to thee, True King, when he became thy Sikh." Guru Gobind Singh made three more calls. Mohkam Chand of Dwārkā, Himmat of Jagannāth, and Sāhib Chand of Bidar cheerfully responded one after another and advanced to offer their heads.

After a while, Guru Gobind Singh led the five Sikhs back from the tent into which he had taken them one by one. In that tent, erected on a hillock and confidentially guarded, he had kept sets of apparel especially made. Decked in saffron-coloured gorgeous raiment topped over with neatly tied turbans of the same colour, the Glorious Five walked deferentially behind their Master, overwhelmed with thankfulness. The Master was himself attired in the same manner as his chosen disciples. The assembly, considerably thinned and still in shocked muteness, was further puzzled to see those whom they had thought

to have been sacrificed to the Guru's whim return in flesh and blood.

The Guru introduced his companions to the audience as *Panj Piāre*, the five devoted spirits beloved of the Guru. He gave vent to his feelings of immense gratefulness for the culmination which had crowned Guru Nānak's revelation. He said the Five Beloved had blessed themselves and brought glory to their faith. They would, added Guru Gobind Singh, form the nucleus of the order of the Khālsā, God's Own, he was going to inaugurate.

He then proceeded to perform the ceremony of baptism. Filling an iron bowl with clean water, he kept churning it with a two-edged sword while reciting over it the sacred verses. The Guru's wife, Mātā Jītojī, brought sugar crystals which were put into the vessel at the Guru's bidding. Sweetness was thus mingled with the alchemy of iron. *Amrit*, the Nectar of Immortality, was now ready.

The Guru gave the five Sikhs each five palmsful of it to drink. The disciple sat *bīrāsan*, i.e. in the heroic posture, with the left knee up and the right knee on the ground. Every time the Master poured the nectar into his palm, he called out aloud: *Wāhigurū jī kā Khālsā, Wāhigurū jī kī Fateh* (Hail the Khālsā who belongs to the Lord God! Hail the Lord God to Whom belongs the victory!!). The Sikh repeated the blessed utterance. After the five life-giving draughts had been administered, the Master sprinkled the holy liquid into his face, gazing intently into his eyes and kindling his spirit with his own inner light. He then anointed his hair with the nectar, consecrating it eternally to the Lord. At the end, all five of them were given the steel bowl to quaff from it, turn by turn, the remaining elixir in token of their having become brothers. Their rebirth into this brotherhood meant the cancellation of their previous family ties, of the occupations which had hitherto determined their place in society, of their earlier beliefs and creeds and of the ritual they had so far observed. Their worship was now to be addressed to none except Akāl, the Timeless One. Their father was Guru Gobind Singh and their place of birth Anandpur. The moment marked for them a complete break with their past.

The five Sikhs—three of them the so-called low-castes, a

Kshatriya and a Jat—formed the nucleus of the self-abnegating, martial and casteless fellowship of the Khālsā Guru Gobind Singh had brought into being. They were given the surname of Singh, meaning lion, and were ever to wear the five emblems of the Khālsā—the *kesha* or long hair and beard, *kanghā*, a comb in the *kesha* to keep it tidy as against the recluses who kept it matted in token of their having renounced the world, *karā*, a steel bracelet, *kachh*, short breeches worn by the soldiers of that time, and *kirpān*, a sword. They were enjoined to succour the helpless and fight the oppressor, to have faith in One God and to consider all human beings equal, irrespective of caste and creed.

Guru Gobind Singh asked the five initiated Sikhs to prepare the *amrit* as he had done. When it was ready, he stood before them with folded hands and besought them to baptize him into their brotherhood. This sounded to the disciples as a strange request, but he explained by telling them that the order of the Khālsā had been created under the direct command of Akāl. The Guru must be one of them, for there was to be no difference between him and the Khālsā. He had created the Khālsā in his own image. The Khālsā was his embodiment, his *alter ego* and his much beloved ideal (*isht suhird*).

The Guru always spoke of his Sikhs with the highest appreciation and esteem. In the "Khālsā Mahimā," in the *Dasam Granth*, he wrote:

> My battles I have won through the favour of
> my Sikhs;
> Through their favour have I been able to
> dispense largesse.
> Through their favour my troubles have receded,
> And through their favour my prosperity expanded.
> It is through their favour that
> I acquired knowledge;
> Through their favour I subdued my enemies.
> Through their favour am I exalted;
> There are, else, millions of such humble
> persons as myself.
> Let my body, my mind, my head, my wealth,
> and all that is mine
> Be to them consecrated!

The Five Sikhs, now invested with authority as Khālsā, stirred water and sugar-puffs in the manner sanctified by the Master. Then he sat in front of his disciples, his left knee up and the right one on the ground, and went through the ceremony of initiation, shouting, repeatedly after them, the newly coined greeting: *Wāhigurū jī kā Khālsā, Wāhigurū jī kī Fateh.* "Hail," as the poet subsequently sang, "Gobind Singh who is himself master as well as disciple." On being baptized by his own disciples, his name was changed from Gobind Dās to Gobind Singh. In this process, he had merged himself into the Khālsā and endowed it with the charisma of his own personality.

To quote from a report of the proceedings: "Though several refused to accept the Guru's religion, about twenty thousand men stood up and promised to obey him, as they had the fullest faith in his divine message." The novitiates came forward in batches to receive the baptism. The first five among those who now volunteered were Rām Singh, Devā Singh, Tahal Singh, Ishar Singh and Fateh Singh. They were called by the Guru Panj Mukte, the Five Liberated Ones. According to the *Guru kīān Sākhīān*, in the next row stood Manī Rām, Bachittar Dās, Ude Rāi, Anik Dās, Ajab Dās, Ajaib Chand, Chaupat Rāi, Diwān Dharam Chand, Ālam Chand Nachnā and Sāhib Rām Koer, followed by Rāi Chand Multānī, Gurbakhsh Rāi, Gurbakhshīsh Rāi, Pandit Kirpā Rām Datt of Mattan, Subeg Chand, Gurmukh Dās, Sanmukh Dās, Amrīk Chand, Purohit Dayā Rām, Barnā, Ghanī Dās, Lāl Chand Peshaurīā, Rūp Chand, Sodhī Dīp Chand, Nand Chand, Nānū Rām of Dilwālī, and Hazārī, Bhandārī and Darbārī of Sirhind. Countless more batches came, each one more eager than the other. Anandpur was seized with an uncanny fervour of the spirit. Baptismal ceremonies continued for several days and thousands of Sikhs entered the fold of the Khālsā, renewing themselves in body as well as in soul.

Further injunctions were laid down for the Sikhs. They must never cut or trim their hair and beards, nor smoke tobacco. A Sikh must not have sexual relationship outside the marital bond, nor eat the flesh of an animal killed slowly in the Muslim way. Violation of any of these rules led to his excommunication from the Khālsā. To return to the fold, he must be rebaptized,

make expiation which could mean rendering personal service in the community kitchen or cleaning the shoes of the *sangat* assembled in religious prayer, and pledge himself not to repeat the offence. The Sikhs were forbidden to have anything to do with those who worshipped images, killed their daughters or countenanced *satī*. They were asked to eat regardless of caste with those who had been baptized and deem them their brothers, to assist one another in time of need, to live by the toil of their hands, never begging for charity, and to contribute one-tenth of their earnings for the common purposes of the community. They were not to covet property or money offered in the name of religion. Such offerings were strictly tabooed for the Sikhs and Guru Gobind Singh often used to quote to them the following verse of Bhāī Gurdās:

> As is the custom of Hindus to abstain from
> the flesh of kine,
> As swine and interest are forbidden
> the Muhammadans,
> As a father-in-law is prohibited from drinking
> even water in his son-in-law's house,
> As a sweeper, though hungry, will not eat
> hare's flesh,
> As a fly gaineth no advantage but dieth in the
> clasp of honey,
> So is greed for sacred offerings which are like
> poison coated with sugar.

The inauguration of the Khālsā was the realization of Guru Gobind Singh's divinely inspired vision and of his design for the uplift of the people. It was a grand creative deed of history conceived to bring about a revolutionary change in the minds of men and arouse their dormant energies for positive and altruistic action. They were to be made conscious of the disabilities of their state, of their servitude and abjectness and taught to stand up on their feet and work ceaselessly and courageously to redeem their predicament. They were to be rid of the superstitions and divisions which had enfeebled and entombed their spirit for centuries and were given a new conceit of themselves and their destiny. A new impulse of chivalry arose in northern India and it resulted in an endless chain of shining deeds of

sacrifice and gallantry, giving an irrevocable turn to the course of events.

How Guru Gobind Singh shook out of their lassitude people reconciled for long to their fallen state, their will to action completely atrophied, is one of the miracles of history. To his invitation to join the new order he had initiated to fight oppression, the hill rājās had replied, "Each Turk can eat a whole goat. How can we, who eat only rice, cope with such strong men? Can sparrows kill hawks, or jackals face tigers?" This psyche of defeat and surrender, not peculiar to the hill rājās alone, had to be superseded. By the alchemy of his *amrit*, the baptismal nectar, and all the metaphysics which culminated in this regenerative principle, Guru Gobind Singh touched the people's hearts with faith and courage. He made one Sikh equal to a host of "a lakh and a quarter" and had "hawks" killed by "sparrows". Even the castaways of Indian society—sweepers, barbers, weavers and others—long suppressed and ostracized, who had never touched a sword and would have cowered at the sight of blood, were turned into stout-hearted warriors. Thus did Guru Gobind Singh transfuse life into the languid and inert body of India.

Guru Gobind Singh had heard complaints against *masands*, heads of *sangats*, in various parts of the country. They had strayed from the path of duty. Most of them were corrupt. They took offerings from the Sikhs, and misused them. They lived in luxury and neglected their religious function. The Guru decided to abolish the system and summoned all the *masands* to Anandpur. Those found guilty were punished.

The free and equalitarian society taking shape in the very citadel of conservatism evoked hostile reaction. The hill aristocrats were especially intolerant. Several of them joined hands and made successive attacks on Anandpur. The fiercest onslaught made was in 1705, when they came aided by Mughal troops from Lahore and Sirhind. The Sikhs, including Guru Gobind Singh's eldest son, Ajīt Singh, fought valiantly.

At the end of the day's fighting, some of the disciples complained to the Guru that a Sikh, called Kanhaiyā, had been giving water and aid not only to the wounded Sikhs but also to the enemy. The Guru asked Kanhaiyā if this was true. "Yes, my lord, it is true in a sense," said Kanhaiyā. "I have been

giving water to everyone who needed it on the field of battle, but I saw no Mughals or Sikhs there. I saw only the Guru's face everywhere." The Guru was pleased with his reply, blessed him and told his Sikhs that Kanhaiyā had understood his teaching correctly.

The chieftains suffered heavy losses, but succeeded in laying siege to the main fort of Anandpur. The Sikhs continued the struggle and for several months the fight went on. The provisions inside ran short. The Sikhs faced starvation. As the siege persisted, the position of the garrison worsened. Some Sikhs suggested evacuation, but Guru Gobind Singh rejected the proposal. A few Sikhs wavered in their faith and insisted on leaving. The Guru told them that they could go if they were prepared to disown him. Forty Sikhs wrote a letter disowning the Guru and left.

Guru Gobind Singh was, however, finally forced to leave Anandpur on the night of December 5-6, 1705. He gave the pursuing troops battle at Chamkaur (December 7, 1705). Most of the handful of his Sikhs, including three of the Panj Piāre, i.e. Bhāī Mohkam Singh, Bhāī Sāhib Singh and Bhāī Himmat Singh, were killed. He then sent into the field his two elder sons, Ajīt Singh and Jujhār Singh, aged eighteen and fourteen. Both of them fell fighting bravely.

Losing nearly all of his brave and devoted Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh left the fort of Chamkaur. Two of his sons had been killed in battle. The younger two—nine-year-old Zorāwar Singh and seven-year-old Fateh Singh—were for their refusal to renege their faith bricked up alive in a wall at Sirhind. They were beheaded under the orders of the Mughal satrap, as the masonry came up to their necks. Yet unshaken was Guru Gobind Singh's faith. Reclining under a tree in a lonely jungle with a broken vessel supporting his head, he sang:

> Soft beds, dear Friend, beloved God,
> Are but a torment without Thee,
> Residence in mansions like living among
> serpents,
> The wine goblet is like the cross,
> its rim like the dagger.
> All this, without Thee, is like
> the keenness of a butcher's thrust!

To dwell with Thee in adversity, dear Friend,
is better, far better
Than residence in palaces without Thee.

Guru Gobind Singh sojourned widely in south-east Punjab. From Dīnā, a village in present-day Farīdkot district, he wrote to Aurangzib a letter in Persian verse called *Zafarnāmah*, the Epistle of Victory. He stressed in the composition how the ethical principle should have supremacy in matters of public policy as well as of private behaviour. Victory and defeat were to be judged by the ultimate standards of morality, and not by temporary material advantage. The epistle was a severe indictment of Aurangzib, who was repeatedly upbraided for breach of faith in the attack made by his troops on the Sikhs after they had vacated Anandpur on the solemn assurances of safe passage given them by him and his officers. By the candid and unambiguous terms in which the emperor and his policies were castigated in it, the *Zafarnāmah* should easily be the most forthright essay on the centrality of truth in diplomacy. It emphatically reiterated the sovereignty of morality in the affairs of State as much as in the conduct of individual human beings, and regarded the means as important as the end. Absolute truthfulness was as much the duty of a sovereign as of any one of the ordinary citizens.

Two of the Guru's Sikhs, Dayā Singh and Dharam Singh, carried the *Zafarnāmah* to Ahmadnagar. They had difficulty in securing access to the emperor, but once the document reached the latter's hands, he was deeply impressed to read it. According to the *Ahkām-i-Ālamgīrī*, he immediately sent through Muhammad Beg, a *gurzbardār* or mace-bearer, and Shaikh Yār Muhammad, a *mansabdār*, a *farmān* to Mun'im Khān, deputy governor of Lahore, asking him to make peace with Guru Gobind Singh. He also invited the Guru for a personal meeting. The *Guru kīān Sākhīān* confirms the invitation sent by Aurangzib and mentions two *gurzbardārs* accompanying Bhāī Dayā Singh and Bhāī Dharam Singh back to the Punjab.

The Sirhind troops had been in pursuit of Guru Gobind Singh. The forty Sikhs, who had renounced the Guru at Anandpur were also following him, full of remorse. They were chided by their womenfolk for having deserted the Guru in the hour of difficulty, and now sought to make reparation for their faith-

lessness. At Khidrānā or Īsharsar, they engaged the pursuing force on December 29, 1705, and fought heroically against heavy odds. Guru Gobind Singh, who happened to be in the vicinity, reached the scene of battle in the evening. He saw that all of the forty Sikhs had fallen in action. One of them, Mahān Singh, lay dying. The Guru promised him any boon he might ask of him. Mahān Singh was happy to see his Master just before his end. He begged him to tear up the letter he and his companions had signed before leaving Anandpur. The paper, which Guru Gobind Singh had preserved through many a strenuous day, was torn. The forty dead were blessed as the Forty *Muktās*, the Forty Immortals. Īsharsar became Muktsar.

Guru Gobind Singh left Khidrānā and, passing through several villages, reached Lakkhī Jungle, a forest between the towns of Bhatindā and Kot Kapūrā. He was impressed by the seclusion and freedom it afforded and decided to stop there awhile. Hearing the news, Sikhs poured in from all sides to see him after prolonged separation—a period marked by harsh and violent events. But there was no trace on Guru Gobind Singh's face of those bitter days.

The next important point of halt was what later came to be known as Damdamā Sāhib, where Guru Gobind Singh arrived on January 17, 1706. Many old Sikhs and bards and poets re-joined him here and felt happily rewarded by a sight of him. The spirit of hilly Anandpur was revived in sandy Damdamā. Guru Gobind Singh proposed to prepare an authorized version of the Granth Sāhib which had had several discrepant transcriptions. The first copy of the Granth Sāhib was transcribed by Bhāī Gurdās at Guru Arjun's dictation. It was the privilege now of Bhāī Manī Singh to write as Guru Gobind Singh spoke. Guru Gobind Singh added to the Volume the compositions of his father, Guru Tegh Bahādur, but none of his own. His writings were subsequently collected by Bhāī Manī Singh and compiled into what came to be known as the *Dasam Granth* or the Book of the Tenth Master.

Dayā Singh and Dharam Singh, who had gone to the Deccan with the *Zafarnāmah*, were still being awaited, when Guru Gobind Singh decided to travel to the South himself. He invited Sikhs from all places before leaving Damdamā Sāhib. As records the *Guru kīān Sākhīān*, from Ramdās came Gurbakhsh Singh (Rām

Koer), of the family of Bhāī Buddhā; from Amritsar, Bhāī Manī Singh with Bhūpat Singh and Gulzār Singh; from Ajnālā, Mahtāb Singh; from Dhilwān, Sodhī Kanwal Nain with his son, Abhai Singh; from Duburjī of Ude Karan, Gurdās Singh; from Bhāī Rūpā, Dharam Singh with a *sangat* of the Brārs; from Sodharā, Bhāī Bajar Singh; from Phūl, Rām Singh with his brother Talok Singh; from Bhuchcho, Bhāī Godarīā Singh; and from Mahimā Ablū, Dān Singh with his son, Gurbakhsh Singh.

Guru Gobind Singh had the Granth Sāhib installed upon an elevated spot, later designated as Damdamā Sāhib by which name the habitation is known to this day. Bhāī Manī Singh was asked to start a continuous reading of the Sacred Book. The commencement hymn received by him is recorded in the *Guru kīān Sākhīān*. This was Guru Arjun's *sabad*, in measure Todī:

> To thy protection have I turned,
> my Lord!
> Give me the gift of Thy Name,
> of Thy praise,
> So in harmony may I dwell,
> Erasing the unease of my mind.
> At Thy door have I at last
> thrown myself,
> No other refuge do I know.
> Rescue this worthless one, O Lord,
> Bring me not to account;
> By this concession alone could I
> be saved.
> Thou art forgiver ever,
> ever beneficent,
> By Thy support are all sustained.
> Slave Nānak follows in the footsteps
> of holy saints,
> Liberate me, O Lord, here and now.

The recitation was concluded on the third day. *Karāhprasād* was distributed. On October 30, 1706, Guru Gobind Singh departed from Damdamā Sāhib.

He was in Rajputana when news arrived of the death, on February 20, 1707, of Aurangzib. The Guru now turned his footsteps towards Delhi. The emperor's death was a signal for

the usual war of succession. Among his sons, Muazzam, the eldest, had the reputation of being a liberal man and he was the rightful heir to the throne. On his request, Guru Gobind Singh sent a body of Sikhs to defend his right to the crown. The battle of Jājaū, near Agra, on June 8, 1707, proved decisive, and Muazzam became emperor of India, with the title of Bahādur Shāh.

Not long afterwards, Guru Gobind Singh left Delhi for Agra and, visiting Mathura and Brindaban on the way, set up camp in a garden outside the city. On hearing of his arrival, the emperor extended to him an invitation to meet him. Guru Gobind Singh set out under an escort of chosen Sikhs and was received by Bahādur Shāh with great honour on July 23, 1707. The emperor expressed immense happiness at seeing the Guru and thanked him for his visit and for the help he had given him in the battle of Jājaū. Before he departed, Bahādur Shāh, presented him, in token of his homage, with a *khill'at*, including a jewelled scarf, a *dhukhdhukhī*, and an aigrette or *kalghī*. The Guru's attendant who waited outside the hall was called in to carry the dress of honour to his camp, contrary to the Mughal practice of the recipient having to put it on in the court.

This meeting not only established cordial relations between Guru Gobind Singh and the emperor, but also became the starting point of parleys between the two on the question of the State's religious policy. Both of them agreed to resume these subsequently, and the Guru was hopeful that he would be able to return to the Punjab at the conclusion of the dialogue that had been opened. He issued letters to his Sikhs to this effect. One of these, addressed to the congregation of Dhaul, has been recently traced. It reads:

> *Sarbat sangat Dhaul kī tusī merā Khālsā ho, Gurū rākhegā. Gurū Gurū japnā janam sauregā. Sarb sukh nāl pātshāh pās āe, siropāo ar sāth hazār kī dhukhdhukhī jarāū inām hoī. Hor bhī kam Gurū kā sadkā sabh hote hai. Asī bhī thore hī dinān nū āvate hān. Sarbat sangat khālse nū merā hukam hai, āpas mo mel karnā; jad asī Kahlūr āvate tad sarbat Khālse hathiār bannh kai hazūr āvanā. Jo āvegā so nihāl hovaigā. Sammat 1764 mitī katko 1 mā.*

> To the *sangat* of Dhaul: You are my Khālsā. The Guru will protect you. Repeat Guru, Guru [always remember the Great Master]. With all happiness, we came to the Pātshāh. A dress of honour and a jewelled *dhukhdhukhī* worth sixty thousand was presented to

> us. With the Guru's grace, the other things are also progressing satisfactorily. In a few days, we are also coming. My instruction to the entire Khālsā *sangat* is to remain united; when we arrive at Kahlūr, the entire Khālsā should come armed. He who comes shall be happy. . . . Sammat 1764, dated Kartik 1/October 2, 1707.

But Bahādur Shāh had to leave suddenly for the Deccan to quell a rebellion by his brother, Kām Bakhsh. Guru Gobind Singh, instead of coming to the Punjab, travelled south with him to continue the negotiations. The two camps marched together and the Guru and the emperor found time to have long conversations on subjects spiritual and temporal. Sometimes the Guru would break away from the caravan to impart his message to the people of the territories through which he was now journeying.

The escorts of the two camps often fell into mutual wranging. Some of the Mughal soldiers had fought against the Sikhs at Anandpur in Wazīr Khān's army, and they inwardly resented the friendly turn in the State's attitude towards Guru Gobind Singh. They deliberately provoked Sikhs who, in turn, would often retaliate. To pacify one such squabble, the Guru sent one of his Sikhs, Mān Singh, who was wise and tactful. But rather than appreciate his peaceable intent, one of the Mughal escort killed him on the spot. The emperor was very sorry to hear of the incident and ordered the murderer to be arrested and then surrendered to Guru Gobind Singh for punishment. But the Guru forgave him and let him return to the royal camp.

As the Guru passed through the princely cities of Jaipur and Jodhpur, the Rajput rājās sent their envoys to wait upon him and do him homage. The camps crossed the Narbadā into the Deccan and travelled further south to reach Nander, on the Godāvari, towards the end of August 1708. Guru Gobind Singh's negotiations with Bahādur Shāh remained inconclusive. He found the emperor evasive and helpless to take any action against fanatical satraps like Wazīr Khān of Sirhind. The Guru saw little profit in pursuing the parleys.

On reaching Nander, Guru Gobind Singh came upon the hermitary of a Bairāgī sādhū, Mādho Dās, who was believed to possess magical powers. Finding him absent from his hut, the Guru laid himself down on his couch to wait for him, while

his Sikhs killed a goat to cook meat for the evening meal. Mādho Dās was furious at this profanation of his monastery and burnt with the desire to chastise the strange visitor for his temerity. But no sooner did he set his eyes on the Guru than all his anger was gone: so was his sorcerous will of which he was greatly proud. He fell at the Guru's feet and called himself his *bandā*, or slave. The brief colloquy which took place is set down by Ahmad Shāh Batālīā in his *Zikr-i-Gurūān wā Ibtidā-i-Singhān wā Mazhab-i-Eshān*, based on contemporary records of his ancestors:

> Mādho Dās: Who are you?
> Guru Gobind Singh: He whom you know.
> Mādho Dās: What do I know?
> Guru Gobind Singh: Think it over in your mind.
> Mādho Dās (after a pause): So you are Guru Gobind Singh.
> Guru Gobind Singh: Yes.
> Mādho Dās: What have you come here for?
> Guru Gobind Singh: I have come so that I may convert you into a disciple of mine.
> Mādho Dās: I submit, my Lord, I am a *bandā* (slave) of yours.

Mādho Dās was baptized on September 3, 1708, with the rites and vows of the Khālsā and given the name of Bandā Singh. The Guru gave him five arrows from his own quiver and an escort, including five of his chosen Sikhs—Bhagwant Singh, Koer Singh, Bāj Singh, Binod Singh and Kāhn Singh, and directed him to go to the Punjab to carry on the campaign against the provincial overlords. Bandā Singh marched northwards, stormed Sirhind, and punished Wazīr Khān. He shook the Mughal rule to its foundations by his successive victories until he was overcome and seized and cruelly done to death in Delhi in 1716.

Guru Gobind Singh was in environs which greatly pleased his heart. Having lived all his life within hearing of the murmurous music of the flowing waters—at Patna where he was born it was the Gangā, at Anandpur, the Sutlej, at Pāontā, the Jamunā—he had a special fascination for a riparian abode. The secluded town of Nander on the margin of the gently moving, slumberous Godāvarī naturally attracted him and he decided to settle there. But he had not a long earthly span left him.

Nawāb Wazīr Khān of Sirhind had felt concerned at the emperor's conciliatory treatment of Guru Gobind Singh. Their marching together to the south made him jealous, and he charged two of his trusted men with murdering the Guru before his increasing friendship with the emperor resulted in any harm to himself. These two Pathans—Jamshed Khān and Wāsil Beg are the names given in the *Guru kīān Sākhīān*—pursued the Guru secretly and overtook him at Nander. They frequently visited the Sikh camp and familiarized themselves with the Guru as well as with his followers. One day, as he lay in his chamber resting after the *Rahirās* prayer, one of the Pathans suddenly fell upon him and stabbed him in the left side near the heart. Before he could attack again, Guru Gobind Singh struck him down with his sabre. His companion fell under the swords of the Sikhs who had rushed in on hearing the noise.

As the news reached Bahādur Shāh's camp, he sent expert surgeons, including an Englishman, to attend on Guru Gobind Singh, and his injury was healed. But, not long after, as he stretched a powerful bow, the wound broke out again and bled profusely. This weakened, beyond recovery, the physical frame which had withstood such stormy times.

On October 6, 1708, Guru Gobind Singh called the disciples to his presence and reminded them how Akāl's Will had to be cheerfully accepted under all conditions and at all times. He asked for the Sacred Volume to be brought forth. To quote the *Bhatt Vahī Talaudā Parganah Jīnd*:

> *Gurū Gobind Singhjī, mahilā dasmān, betā Gurū Tegh Bahādurjī kā, potā Gurū Hargobindjī kā, parpotā Gurū Arjunjī kā, bans Gurū Rām Dāsjī kī, Sūrajbansī Gosal gotra, Sodhī Khatrī, bāsī Anandpur, parganah Kahlūr, muqām Nander tad Godāvarī, des dakkan, sammat satrān sai painsath Kārtik mās kī chauth, sukla pakkhe, budhvār ke dihun, Bhāī Dayā Singh se bachan hoyā, Srī Granth Sāhib lai āo, bachan pāi Dayā Singh Srī Granth Sāhib lai āye. Gurūjī ne pānch paise nārīal āge bhetā rākhā, māthā tekā, sarbatt sangat se kahā merā hukam hai merī jāgāh Srī Granthjī ko jānanā, jo Sikh jānegā tis kī ghāl thāen pāegī Gurū tis kī bahurī taregā, satt kar mānanā.*
>
> Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Master, son of Guru Tegh Bahādur, grandson of Guru Hargobind, great-grandson of Guru Arjun, of the family of Guru Rām Dās, Sūrajbansī, Gosal clan, Sodhī

> Khatrī, resident of Anandpur, *parganah* Kahlūr, now at Nander, in the Godāvarī country in the Deccan, asked Bhāī Dāyā Singh, on Wednesday, October 6, 1708, to fetch Srī Granth Sāhib. In obedience to his orders, Dayā Singh brought Srī Granth Sāhib. The Guru placed before it five pice and a coconut and bowed his head before it. He said to the *sangat*, "It is my commandment: Own Srī Granthjī in my place. He who so acknowledges it will obtain his reward. The Guru will rescue him. Know this as the truth."

According to Giānī Garjā Singh who discovered this entry, the author is Narbud Singh Bhatt, son of Kesho Singh Bhatt. Narbud Singh was with Guru Gobind Singh at Nander at that time.

Another contemporary document which authenticates the fact of Guru Granth Sāhib having been invested with the final authority is a letter issued by reference of Mātā Sundarījī. To quote from the original, which is now in the possession of Bhāī Chet Singh, of the village of Bhāī Rūpā, to whose ancestors it was addressed:

> *Ikk Oankār Wāhgurū jī kī fateh. Srī Akālpurkhjī kā Khālsā yak rang jinā dithiā Wāhgurūjī chit āvai. Bhāī Sāhib Dān Singhjī Bhāī Dunī Singhjī Bhāī Jagat Singhjī Bhāī Gurbakhsh Singhjī Ugar Singhjī Bhāī Rām Singhjī sarbatt Khālsā Wāhgurū Akālpurkhjī kā pāse likhtam gulām Khālsā jī kā Kāhn Singh Nival Singh Mūl Singhjī Sujān Singh Gajā Singh Mahān Singh sarbatt Khālsā Wāhgurū Akālpurkh kā Wāhgurū jī kī fateh vāchanī khushā karnā ki Wāhgurū Akālpurkhjī har dam chit āvai sukh hoe Khālse jī kā bol bālā hoi ardās tusādī mārfat Bhāī Dulchā Singh ke hath pahutī parhkai Khālsājī bahut khushwaqat hoiyā tusāde bāb Khālsājī dayāl ho kai hath jore hai jo rakhyā hove. "Jo jan harikā sevako hari tiske kāmī." Gurū Gurū japnā Wāhgurū ang sang hai fajal karkai rakhiā hovegī Khālsājī Bhāī Kāhn Singhjī kau Mātā Sāhibjī ne gumāstgirī Amritsar jī kī mukarar kītī hai Khālsājī ne gurmatā karke Harimandir ate bāgh dī murammat imārat kā kām shurū kītā hai Srī Mātā Sāhibjī ne likhā hai ki Wāhgurū Akālpurkh jī kī nagarī hai langar jarūr karnā. . . Khālsā Srī Wāhgurū jī kā suchet bibek budh chāhie jo sivāi Akālpurkh dūje no jānai nāhī. Dasān Pātshāhīān tak iāmai paidhe yārvīn bārvīn Bandā Chaubandā Ajītā vagaire*

te aitkād lai āvanā hatiyā hai. Hor hatiyā Gurū japan nāl dūr hosan, par ih hatiyā gunāh bakshtaigā nāhī jo manukh ke jāme upar aitkād karenge. 'Mukh [mohi] pheriai mukh [mohi] jūthā hoi.' Khālsā jī tusān sivāi Akāl dūje no mannanā nāhī. Sabad dasvīn pātshāhī tak khojnā. "Sabad khoji ihu gharu lahai Nānak tākā dāsu." Gurū kā nivās sabad vich hai. "Gur mahi āp samoi sabad vartāiyā." "Jiān andar jī sabad hai jit sahu milāvā hoi." Wāhgurū jī kī fateh. Bhāi Mehar Singh tahliā Bhāi Būle kā pattar ke khasmāne vich rahinā Gurū nāl gandh paisī.

Ikk Oankār Wāhigurū jī kī Fateh

The Khālsā, of the Timeless Himself, immersed in the One, and whose sight brings Wāhigurū to mind. Addressed to Bhāī Sāhib Dān Singhjī, Bhāī Dunī Singhjī, Bhāī Jagat Singhjī, Bhāī Gurbaksh Singhjī, Ugar Singhjī, Bhāī Rām Singhjī, the entire Khālsā of Wāhigurū, the Timeless One. From the slaves of the Khālsājī, Kāhn Singhjī, Nival Singh, Mūl Singhjī, Sujān Singh, Gajā Singh, Mahā Singh. Wāhigurūjī kī Fateh to the entire Khālsā. May you be rejoiced in constant remembrance of the Timeless Wāhigurū. May prosperity prevail, may supremacy belong to the Khālsā. Having received your missive through Bhāī Dulchā Singh, Khālsājī is highly pleased. Khālsājī happily prays with folded hands for your security. "He who to Lord surrenders himself, his affairs the Lord will set to rights." Repeat always the name of Gurū. Wāhigurū is by your side. He will extend to you His grace and protection. Khālsājī, Mātā Sāhibji has appointed Bhāī Kāhn Singhjī to the superintendence of Amritsarjī. The Khālsājī, through a *gurmatā*, has taken in hand the construction and repair of the Harimandir and the garden. Shrī Mātā Sāhibjī has written that *langar* must be run in that place which is the abode of God Himself. . . . Wāhigurū's Khālsā must always be alert, be possessed of discriminating wisdom. The Khālsā must believe in none other than the Timeless One. There have been only Ten Masters in human form ; to believe in the eleventh and twelfth, Bandā [Bandā Singh Bahādur], Ajītā Ajīt Singh, adopted son of Mātā Sundarījī], etc., is a mortal sin. Every other sin can be had cancelled by repeating the Guru's name, but this sin of believing in human forms will not be remitted. "The faces turned away from the Guru are faces perverted." Khālsājī, you must believe in none other except the Timeless One. Go only to the Ten Gurus in search of the Word. "Nānak is the slave of him who by seeking the Lord's Name obtains his goal." The Guru resides in *sabad*, "The Lord hath merged His own Self in the Guru through whom He hath revealed His Word." "The Word is the life of all life, for, through it, one experiences God." Victory to the Lord. Bhāī Mehar Singh, the messenger, son of Bhāī Būlā : keep the letter secure in your custody. You will gain the Guru's favour.

From this letter, it is clear how the Sikhs after Guru Gobind Singh believed that the Guruship had passed to the *sabad*, i.e. Word as contained in the Guru Granth Sāhib. None in human form after the Ten Gurus was to be acknowledged by the Sikhs as Guru. Those who, like some of Bandā Singh's or Ajīt Singh's followers, called their leaders Gurus were committing a mortal sin. All other sins, says the letter, could be had forgiven by repeating the Guru's name, but not the sin of believing in a living Guru after the Ten Masters of the Sikh faith.

Another authority that may relevantly be quoted is Devaraja Sharma's *Nānakacandrodayamahākāvyam*, an old Sanskrit manuscript which has recently been published by Sanskrit University, Vārānasī. It records Guru Gobind Singh's proclamation that Scripture would be the Guru after him. While the Master lay on his deathbed, Nand Lāl [?] came forward and asked the following question: "Who shall be our teacher now? Whom shall we salute and see and what shall be the object of our discourses?" The Master replied, "The Granth, which itself is the doctrine of the Guru, shall be your teacher. This is what you should see; this is what you should honour; this is what should be the object of your discourses." The original, in Sanskrit, reads as follows :

Nandalālas tadāprcchat ko asmākam adhunā guruh
kam namena ca pasyema kasmai vārtā vadema ca
ūce gurustu yusmākam grantha eva gururmatah
tam nameta ca pasyeta tasmai vārtā vadeta ca

Nānakacandrodayamahākāvyam, XXI, 227-229

That the Guru Granth is Guru eternal for it has been the understanding and conviction of the Sikh community since the passing away of Guru Gobind Singh. In their hard, exilic days soon afterwards, when they were outlawed and had to seek the safety of hills and jungles, the Sikhs' most precious possession which they cherished and defended at the cost of their lives was the Guru Granth. The Holy Book was their sole religious reference, and they acknowledged none other. In the time of Mahārājā Ranjīt Singh, who established sovereignty in the name of the Khālsā, personal piety and court ceremonial centred upon the Guru Granth. As contemporary records testify,

Ranjit Singh began his day by making obeisance to the Guru Granth. On festive occasions, he made pilgrimage to Amritsar to bow before the Guru Granth in the Harimandir. For the Sikhs in general, Guru Granth was the only focus of religious attachment. None other existed either in human form or in the form of a symbol. In all Sikh literature after Guru Gobind Singh, the Holy Book is uniformly referred to as the *Guru* Granth.

The personal Guruship was thus ended by Guru Gobind Singh himself. Succession now passed to the Guru Granth in perpetuity. This was a most significant development in the history of the community. The finality of the Holy Book was a fact rich in religious and social implications. The Guru Granth was acknowledged as the medium of the Divine revelation descended through the Gurus. It was for the Sikhs the perpetual authority, spiritual as well as historical. They lived their religion in response to it. Through it, they were able to observe their faith more fully, more vividly. It was central to all that subsequently happened in Sikh life. From it the community's ideals, institutions and rituals derived their meaning. It constituted the regulative principle for its aspiration and action, the integral focus of its psyche.

The Word enshrined in the Holy Book was always revered by the Gurus as well as by their disciples as of Divine origin. The Guru was the revealer of the Word. One day the Word was to take the place of the Guru. The line of personal Gurus could not have continued for ever. The inevitable came to pass when Guru Gobind Singh declared the Guru Granth as his successor. It was only through the Word that Guruship could be made everlasting. This object Guru Gobind Singh secured by his uncanny vision and genius. The Guru Granth was henceforth, and for all time to come, the Guru for the Sikhs.

Guru Gobind Singh uttered a spirited *Wāhigurū jī kā Khālsā, Wāhigurū jī kī Fateh*, to bid his last farewell to the Sikhs—Sikhs who loved him above everything else and had dared and achieved so much under his direction and inspiration and for whose sake he had considered no sacrifice too great. As the Sikhs responded with *Wāhigurū jī kā Khālsā, Wāhigurū jī kī Fateh*, he departed this life in the early hours of October 7, 1708. Thus passed from the earthly scene a great

teacher and regenerator of mankind—the anointed messenger who revealed God's ways and Will to the people and showed by personal example the ultimate possibilities of the human soul for compassionate as well as for heroic action and for suffering in vindication of the highest truth and values known to man.

The Sikhs made preparations for the obsequies. The sacred body was placed on the pyre erected inside an enclosure formed of tent-walls and the fire was lit amidst the chanting of holy hymns. The *Sohilā* was then recited and *karāhprasād* was distributed. Away from the Punjab and bereft of the physical appearance of the Master, Sikhs felt an emptiness they had not known before in their history beginning from Guru Nānak. But they remembered the words of the Guru who had blended himself with the Khālsā. This sense of the indwelling presence of the Guru, through the Guru Granth and the Panth, which meant the collective body of the Khālsā, gradually took hold of them and, in course of time, permeated the collective consciousness of the community. This has been the Sikhs' living belief which has shaped the course of their history and led to one of the noblest endeavours in the annals of mankind in the cause of humanity, dignity and freedom.

Guru Gobind Singh's work is best understood as the fulfilment of Guru Nānak's revelation. Explaining the purpose of his life in the *Bachitra Nātak*, Guru Gobind Singh said:

> For this purpose was I born,
> Understand all ye pious people:
> To uphold righteousness, to protect those worthy and virtuous,
> To overcome and destroy the evil-doers.

Guru Gobind Singh had set himself against oppression and intolerance. He did not fight for any territory or worldly power, nor against any religion or sect. Among his admirers and followers were Muslims as well as Hindus. Many staunch followers of Islam had aligned themselves with him against the imperial armies. Two of the sons of Pīr Buddhū Shāh, a Muslim divine, and a number of his disciples sacrificed their lives in the battle of Bhangānī fighting on the Guru's side. The Muslim ruler of Mālerkotlā, Nawāb Sher Muhammad Khān, had raised a strong protest against the execution of

Guru Gobind Singh's two minor sons at Sirhind. Thus people of different faiths were attracted to the Guru whose teaching was that all men were equal and that, though the outer forms differed, the fundamental truth was the same everywhere.

The Sikh organization had taken on the semblance of a State during Guru Gobind Singh's days. But amidst all its splendour, he maintained puritanical standards of simplicity in his personal life. Guru Nānak had struck a gentle note, but no one could mistake its implacability towards injustice and hypocrisy. Guru Gobind Singh's response to the situation he was confronted with was in keeping with that disposition.

All the Gurus shared the same light. This belief is central to the Sikhs' understanding of their history. Guru Gobind Singh himself says in his *Bachitra Nātak*: "He who knoweth this reality [of the Ten Gurus being one entity] captureth the truth. Without knowing this, one remaineth in illusion." Bhāī Nand Lāl, a contemporary of Guru Gobind Singh, perceived this truth and sang in his Persian couplets:

> Nānak is the same, as is Angad. The same is the virtuous and glorious Amar Dās. Rām Dās is also the same; the same is Arjun. The same is the noble and excellent Hargobind; the same is Har Rāi to whom are transparent this world and the next. The same is exalted Har Krishan who fulfilleth the desire of every luckless one. The same is also Guru Tegh Bahādur. From the same light is Gobind Singh. Guru Gobind Singh is the same as Nānak.

Guru Nānak has been a continuing reality, an abiding presence. All succeeding Gurus bore witness to this fact; so did the community which was developing under their care. Of this subtle relationship and the pervasive influence of Guru Nānak there is interesting contemporary testimony which authenticates the Sikh belief that all the Ten Gurus embodied the same light and worked for the implementation of truths revealed by the First, Guru Nānak. This belief is not a matter of reading history backwards. As has been mentioned in an earlier chapter, Sattā and Balwand, minstrels contemporary of the Second, Third and Fourth Gurus, sang in verse, preserved in the Guru Granth, of Guru Nānak's revelation manifesting itself in the successors. This is exactly how Bhāī Gurdās, a contemporary of the Fifth

Guru, perceived the phenomenon of spiritual succession in the forming Sikh tradition.

Mobid Zulfiqār Ardistānī, a contemporary of the Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Gurus, to whom reference has already been made, lends authenticity to the testimony of Bhāī Gurdās and his predecessors and specifically refers to the current Sikh belief that he who recognizes not Guru Arjun the same as Guru Nānak apostatizes himself.

Guru Gobind Singh himself wrote in *Bachitra Nātak*, "Nānak assumed the body of Angad . . . . Afterwards, Nānak was called Amar Dās, as one lamp is lit from another. . . . The holy Nānak was revered as Angad. Angad was recognized as Amar Dās. And Amar Dās became Rām Dās . . . . When Rām Dās was blended with the Divine, he gave the Guruship to Arjun. Arjun appointed Hargobind in his place and Hargobind gave his seat to Har Rāi. Har Krishan, his son, then became Guru. After him came Tegh Bahādur."

This oneness, this unity of the Gurus came home to the Sikhs through their belief in the presence of Guru Nānak in them. For the Gurus themselves, this presence was a constant reality, an inspiration and the norm in the exercise of their spiritual office. They wrote sacred verse in the name of the First Guru. All their hymns in the Guru Granth bear the *nom de plume* of Nānak. Thus we have the compositions of Nānak I, Nānak II, Nānak III, and so on. They have a remarkable correspondence of tone and concept; in both utterance and deed later Gurus, Nānaks themselves as the Sikhs believe, were acting out the intuition received from Guru Nānak.

The memory of Guru Nānak was in this manner operative in subsequent Sikh development. The interplay of the original impulse and the exigencies of contemporary historical environment set the course of this evolution. Challenges arose. New situations demanded, and elicited, new answers. Points of transfiguration were reached and worked out; yet it is possible to discern in this process a basic harmony and continuity attributable primarily to the ever-present Nānak legend. Each of the successor-Gurus contributed towards the evolution of the creed and the civil organization of the community in accordance with the spirit of the teaching inherited from Guru Nānak and the existing historical factors.

Guru Gobind Singh sealed the line of personal Gurus and passed on the succession to the Holy Book, the Guru Granth. He declared to the Sikhs at the time of his death that the Word as embodied in the Granth would be the Guru after him. "The Guru's spirit," said he, "will henceforth be in the Granth and the Khālsā. Where the Granth is with any five Sikhs as representing the Khālsā, there will the Guru be."

For Sikhs the Guru Granth has since been the Guru. Through it Guru Nānak lives on in the Sikh faith and tradition as a reality transcending time and space. This awareness of the continuing presence of Guru Nānak has been of crucial importance to the Sikh community as a whole as well as to its members individually. It has been an impelling factor in their history and has given them unity and a sense of purpose. Singly and in groups they practise this presence daily when, in their homes and in the congregations in the *gurdwārās*, they conclude their morning and evening prayers or prayer said at any other time as part of personal piety or of a ceremony with the words: *Nānak nām charhdī kalā tere bhāne sarbatt kā bhalā*—In Nānak's name we pray! May Thy name, Thy glory, O God, be ever in the ascendant, and, in Thy Will, may peace and happiness come to one and all in the world!!

CHAPTER VII

TESTING TIME

The eighteenth century was a period of great political upheaval and turmoil in the Punjab. It witnessed a prolonged drama of constant battle, foreign invasion and internal conflict. Warring powers such as the Mughals, the Marāthās and the Afghans, strove with each other for supremacy. Their mutual fighting produced conditions of utter confusion and anarchy. But order gradually evolved out of a chaotic situation and the process took a whole century to work itself out. The Mughal authority in the Punjab had begun showing signs of weakness soon after Aurangzib's death in 1707, and the subsequent perplexity and uncertainty continued until 1799—the year Ranjīt Singh occupied Lahore and laid the foundation of a new State.

For the Sikhs this was a time of grim trial as also of supreme moral exaltation which accrued to them because of their heroic struggle for their faith and their perseverance in meeting the challenge of a sustained and fierce persecution. They suffered continual oppression almost throughout the century and there were moments when their persecutors thought they had extirpated the entire sect. To crushing their existence the Mughal rulers had, in fact, vowed themselves. They were outlawed and ordered to be killed at sight and a severed Sikh head brought the tyrant a reward from the government.

The Sikhs matched the situation with a rare power of endurance. They sanctified this period of their history with deeds of unparalleled sacrifice and courage and the Sikh character presented in this testing time its truest aspect. In the strife that was forced upon them lay the seed of their subsequent political ascendancy and they were able to set up their authority in the Punjab after vanquishing their persecutors. But, in the midst of the direst struggle, they never went back on their high-minded religious ideal, nor did they forswear their spirit of magnanimity.

History records a high and unusual tribute to the Sikhs' qualities of courage and integrity during this period of harrowing oppression. The attester is their sworn enemy, Qāzī Nūr Muhammad, who came to India with the army of Ahmad Shāh Durrānī at the time of his seventh invasion of the country (1764-65), and who was witness to the Sikhs' battles with the invader. In his poetic account, in Persian, of the Durrānī's campaign, he refers to the Sikhs in rude and imprecatory language, but cannot at the same time help proclaiming their many natural virtues. In Section XLI of his poem, for example, he says:

> Do not call the 'dogs' [his contumelious term for Sikhs] dogs, for they are lions, and are courageous like lions in the field of battle. How can a hero, who roars like a lion in the field of battle, be called a dog? If you wish to learn the art of war, come face to face with them in the field. They will demonstrate it to you in such a way that one and all will praise them for it. If you wish to learn the science of war, O swordsman, learn from them how to face an enemy like a hero and to get safely out of an action. *Singh* is a title [a form of address for them]. It is not just to call them dogs. If you do not know the Hindustani language, [I shall tell you that] the word *singh* means a lion. Truly, they are like lions in battle and, in times of peace, they surpass Hātim [in generosity]. . . .
> Leaving aside their mode of fighting, hear ye another point in which they excel all other fighting people. In no case would they slay a coward, nor would they put an obstacle in the way of a fugitive. They do not plunder the wealth and ornaments of a woman, be she a well-to-do lady or a maidservant. There is no adultery among these 'dogs' . . . they do not make friends with adulterers and house-breakers . . . .

The Sikh leader who presaged a troublous century's daring chain of events was Bandā Singh Bahādur (1670-1716). From Nander, he came to the Punjab armed with Guru Gobind Singh's blessings and a drum, a banner and five arrows as emblems of the authority he had bestowed upon him. He issued *hukamnāmahs* to Sikhs in the Punjab calling upon them to join him. In the words of Ratan Singh Bhangū, *Prāchīn Panth Prakāsh*, he had it proclaimed:

> To occupy the country has the Guru sent me, to destroy root and branch the rulers of Sirhind, to vanquish the hill people. I am the

> slave of him who revealed the Khālsā. I have to avenge myself on those who bore enmity towards the Guru. Them if I rout one by one, then alone shall I be designated the Guru's Bandā (slave).

Like a whirlwind, Bandā Singh swept the country. Any resistance was impossible. Success attended his arms wherever he went. The dramatic turn in events reached a climax in his triumphal entry on May 14, 1710, into Sirhind, where two of Guru Gobind Singh's sons had met with a cruel fate at the hands of Wazīr Khān, the Mughal satrap.

Bāj Singh, one of Bandā Singh's leading companions, was appointed governor of Sirhind. Bandā Singh thus laid the foundation of Sikh sovereignty in the Punjab. He assumed the style of royalty and struck coin in the name of the Guru. Rendered into English, the Persian inscription on his coins read:

> By the grace of True Lord is struck the coin in the two worlds;
> The sword of Nānak is the granter of all boons,
> And the victory is of Guru Gobind Singh, the King of Kings.

Bandā Singh's rule, though short-lived, had a far-reaching impact on the history of the Punjab. With it began the decay of Mughal authority and the demolition of the feudal system of society it had created. Bandā Singh abolished the *zamīndārī* system and made the tillers masters of the lands by conferring upon them proprietory rights. This marked a revolutionary change in the social order in the Punjab and led to the emergence of peasants as a potent force in the political life of the country.

Bandā Singh's increasing influence roused the ire of the Mughal emperor, Bahādur Shāh, who journeyed northwards from the Deccan to punish the Sikhs. Instructions were issued to the governors of Delhi and Oudh and other Mughal officers to march towards the Punjab. Prohibitory laws against the Sikhs were passed. Fearing that some Sikhs might not have smuggled themselves into the royal camp disguised as Hindus, Bahādur Shāh ordered all Hindus employed in the imperial offices to shave off their beards. Emperor Bahādur Shāh's order, issued on December 10, 1710, was a general warrant for the *faujdārs* to "kill the worshippers of Nānak, i.e. Sikhs, wherever found (*Nānak prastān rā har jā kih bayāband*

baqatl rasānand)." Even in face of this edict for a wholesale destruction of the Sikhs, Bandā Singh did not resile from the principles of his faith and maintained towards the Muslims an attitude of tolerance. As reported to Emperor Bahādur Shāh on April 28, 1711 (*Akhbārāt-i-Darbār-i-Muallā*), "the wretched Nānak-worshipper [Bandā Singh] had his camp in the town of Kalānaur. He has promised and proclaimed: 'I do not oppress the Muslims.' Accordingly, for any Muslim who approaches him, he fixes a daily allowance and wage, and looks after him. He has permitted them to recite *khutbā* and *namāz*. As such five thousand Muslims have gathered round him. Having entered into friendship with him, they are free to shout their call —*azān*, and make their devotions—*namāz* . . . ."

The massive imperial force drove the Sikhs from Sirhind and other places to take shelter in the fort of Lohgarh in the submontane region. Here they made a determined stand. "It is impossible for me," says Khāfī Khān, a Muslim historian of that time, "to describe the fight which followed. The Sikhs in their faqīr's dress struck terror into the hearts of the royal troops. The number of casualties among the latter was so large that for a time it appeared as if they were going to lose."

Further reinforcements arrived and sixty thousand horse and foot closely invested Bandā Singh's hilly retreat. For want of provisions, Sikhs were reduced to rigorous straits. They killed their horses for food and, when they could stand up to the enemy no longer, they made a desperate nightly sally to escape into the hills of Nāhan.

Bandā Singh was far from vanquished. A *hukamnāmah*, issued by him to his followers within a fortnight of his leaving the fort of Lohgarh, showed the spirit which swayed the Sikhs during those arduous times. The following is an English version of Bandā Singh's letter.

> *Deg o teg o fateh o nusrat bedirang*
> *Yāft az Nānak Guru Gobind Singh*
> The kettle and the sword [symbols of charity and power], victory and blessing have been obtained from Guru Nānak-Gobind Singh. God is One! Victory to the Presence!! This is the order of Srī Sachchā Sāhib [the True Great Master] to the entire Khālsā of Jaunpur. The Guru will protect you. Call upon the Guru's name. Your lives will be fruitful. You are the Khālsā of the great Immortal

> God. On seeing this letter, repair to the presence, wearing five arms. Observe the rules of conduct laid down for the Khālsā. Do not use *bhang*, tobacco, poppy, wine, or any other intoxicant. . . . Commit no theft or adultery. We have brought about Satyuga [the Golden Age]. Love one another. This is my wish. He who lives according to the rules of the Khālsā shall be saved by the Guru.

Sikhs came out of their mountain haunts to recover their lost territories and occupied once again Sadhaurā and Lohgarh. Farrukh Sīyar, who came to the throne of Delhi in 1713, launched against them the sternest proceedings that political authority stirred with a fanatical religious zeal could devise. They were hounded out of the plains of the Punjab and their main column, under Bandā Singh, was subjected to a most stringent siege at the village of Gurdās-Nangal, about six kilometres from Gurdāspur. Gurdās-Nangal was an epic of purest heroism in face of heavy odds. According to Muhammad Qāsim, the Muslim author of *Ibratnāmah*, who has given an eye-witness account of this campaign, the "brave and daring deeds [of the Sikhs] were amazing. Twice or thrice a day, some forty or fifty of them would come out of their enclosure to gather grass for their animals, and, when the combined forces of the emperor went to oppose them, they made short work of the Mughals with arrows, muskets and small swords, and then disappeared. Such was the terror of these people and the fear of the sorcery of their chief that the commanders of the royal army prayed that God might so ordain things that Bandā Singh should seek safety in flight."

The supplies having run out, the Sikhs suffered grave hardships and lived on animal flesh which they had to eat raw owing to lack of firewood. To quote the Muslim authority (Khāfī Khān) again, "Many died of dysentery and privation.... When all the grass was gone, they gathered leaves from the trees. When these were consumed, they stripped the bark and broke off the small shoots, dried them, ground them and used them instead of flour, thus keeping body and soul together. They collected the bones of animals and used them in the same way. Some assert that they saw a few of the Sikhs cut flesh from their own thighs, roast it, and eat it."

For eight long months, the garrison resisted the siege under these gruesome conditions. The royal armies at last broke

through and captured Bandā Singh and his famishing Sikhs. Nearly three hundred of them were killed on the spot, filling, as another contemporary Muslim historian, Kāmwar Khān, the author of *Tazkirāt-us-Salātīn*, says, "that extensive plain with blood as if it had been a dish." The rest, along with Bandā Singh, were taken to Lahore, and, thence to Delhi. The cavalcade to the imperial capital was a grisly sight. Besides 740 prisoners in heavy chains, it comprised seven hundred cartloads of the heads of the Sikhs with another 2,000 stuck upon pikes.

C.R. Wilson, a Bengal civilian, has given in his *Early Annals of the English in Bengal* the following description of the entry of the Sikh captives into Delhi:

> Malice did its utmost to cover the vanquished with ridicule and shame. First came the heads of the executed Sikhs, stuffed with straw, and stuck on bamboos, their long hair streaming in the wind like a veil, and along with them to show that every living creature in Gurdaspur had perished, a dead cat on a pole. The teacher [Bandā Singh] himself, dressed out of mockery in a turban of a red cloth, embroidered with gold, and a heavy robe of brocade flowered with pomegranates, sat in an iron cage, placed on the back of an elephant. Behind him stood a mail-clad officer, with a drawn sword. After him came the other prisoners, seven hundred and forty in number, seated two and two upon camels without saddles. Each wore a high foolscap of sheepskin and had one hand pinned to his neck, between two pieces of wood. Many were also dressed in sheepskin with woolly side turned upwards. At the end of the procession rode three great nobles, Muhammad Amin Khan, sent by the emperor to bring in prisoners (from Agharabad to the Lahori gate of the palace), Qamr-ud-Din, his son, and Zakariya Khan, his son-in-law, who being also the son of Abd-us-Samad Khan had been deputed to represent the father at the ceremony. The road to the palace, for several miles, was lined with troops and filled with exultant crowds, who mocked at the teacher and laughed at the grotesque appearance of his followers. They wagged their heads and pointed the finger of scorn at the poor wretched as they passed. 'Hu! Hu! infidel dog-worshippers, your day has come. Truly, retribution follows on transgression, as wheat springs from wheat, and barley from barley!!' Yet the triumph could not have seemed complete. Not all the insults that their enemies had invented could rob the teacher and his followers of their dignity. Without any sign of dejection or shame, they rode on, calm, cheerful, even anxious to die the death of martyrs. Life was promised to any who would renounce their faith, but they would not prove false to their

Guru, and at the place of suffering their constancy was wonderful to look at. 'Me deliverer, kill me first,' was the prayer which constantly rang in the ears of the executioner. Once there was a young man, an only son, whose widowed mother had made many applications to the Mughal officers, declaring that her son was a Sikh prisoner, and no follower of the Guru. A release was granted and she hastened to the prison-house to claim her son. But the boy turned from her to meet his doom crying, 'I know not this woman. What does she want with me? I am a true and loyal follower of the Guru.' For a whole week the sword of the executioner did its butcher's work. Every day a hundred brave men perished and at night the headless bodies were loaded into carts; taken out of the city and hung upon trees. It was not till June 9 (Sunday, the 29th Jamadi-ul-Akhir, 1128 A.H., June 9, 1716 O.S.) that Banda himsel was led out to execution, all efforts having failed to buy him off. They dressed him, as on the day of his entry, set him again on an elephant, and took him away to the old city, where the red Qutb Minar lifts its proud head of white marble over the crumbling walls of the Hindu fortress. Here they paraded him round the tomb of the late emperor, Bahadur Shah, and put him to a barbarous death. First they had him dismount, placed his child in his arms and bade him kill it. Then, as he shrank with horror from the act, they ripped open the child before the father's eyes, thrust its quivering flesh into his mouth and hacked him to pieces limb by limb.

The ambassadors of the East India Company, John Surman and Edward Stephenson, who were then in Delhi and had witnessed some of these massacres, wrote to the governor of Fort William:

> The great Rebel Gooroo [Bandā Singh] who has been for these 20 years so troublesome in the Subaship of Lahore is at length taken with all his family and attendance by Abd-us-Samad Cawn, the Suba [Sūbadār, i.e. governor] of that province. Some days ago they entered the city laden with fetters, his whole attendants which were left alive being about seven hundred and eighty all severally mounted on camels which were sent out of the city for that purpose besides about two thousand heads stuck upon poles, being those who died by the sword in battle. He was carried into the presence of the King, and from thence to a close prison. He at present has his life prolonged with most of his *Mutsuddis* in the hope to get an account of his treasure in the several parts of his kingdom, and of those that assisted him, when afterwards he will be executed, for the rest there are 100 each day beheaded. It is not a little remarkable with what patience they undergo their fate, and to the last it has not been found that one apostatized from his new formed religion.

This letter was written on March 10, 1716. Executions continued and, on June 9, came the turn of Bandā Singh. Harshest torments had been reserved for him. His eyes were pulled out and his hands and feet chopped off. His flesh was torn with red-hot pincers. The end came, mercifully for him, with the executioner's axe falling on his neck.

CHAPTER VIII

SUFFERING CREATES POWER

The carnage in Delhi was followed by further tyrannous action against the Sikhs. But every fresh adversity only stimulated their will to survival and self-assertion. A commanding figure who led them through this dark period was Nawāb Kapūr Singh, the founder of the Dal Khālsā. By his bold example and wise leadership, he welded the Sikhs into a strong fighting force and implanted in their minds the vision of political sovereignty. He was the true embodiment of Sikh character forged by the alchemy of a fiery ordeal and enjoyed unique esteem for his courage, sacrifice and religious devotion. When, in pursuance of peace, an offer of Nawābship and a *jāgīr* for the Sikhs came from the Mughal government, he was unanimously chosen by the Sikhs to receive the title on their behalf.

Nawāb Kapūr Singh was born of a Virk family of Jats in 1697. His native village was Kālo-ke, now in Sheikhūpurā district, in Pakistan Punjab. Later, when he seized the village of Faizullāpur, near Amritsar, he renamed it Singhpurā and started living there. He is also known to history as Kapūr Singh Faizullāpuriā, and the small principality he founded as Faizullāpuriā's or Singhpuriā's state.

Kapūr Singh was eleven years old at the time of Guru Gobind Singh's death and nineteen at the time of the massacres in Delhi. He had thus passed his early life in an atmosphere charged with the fervour of faith and sacrifice. He came into living touch with the new impulse animating his people when he took baptism at a large gathering of Sikhs held at Amritsar on the occasion of the Baisākhī of 1721. Bhāī Manī Singh who had been sent to Amritsar as head priest of the Harimandir by Guru Gobind Singh's widow, Mātā Sundarī, conducted the ceremony. Kapūr Singh's youthful heart was fired with a new enthusiasm. His father, Dalīp Singh, and

brother, Dān Singh, were also among those who were baptized into the Khālsā fold on that historic day.

Kapūr Singh's physical courage and warlike spirit were valuable qualities in those days of high adventure. He soon gained a position of eminence among his people who were then engaged in a desperate struggle against the Mughal government. Zakariyā Khān, who became the governor of Lahore in 1726, launched a still severer policy against the Sikhs and let loose terror upon them. Kapūr Singh headed a band of warriors who, with a view to paralyzing the administration and obtaining food for their companions forced to seek shelter in remote hills and forests, attacked government treasuries and caravans moving from one place to another. Such was the effect of their depredations that the governor was soon obliged to make terms with them.

In 1733, the Mughal government decided, at the instance of Zakariyā Khān, to lift the quarantine forced upon the Sikhs and made an offer of a grant to them. Subeg Singh, a Sikh resident of village Jambar, near Lahore, who was for a time *Kotvāl* or police inspector of the city under Muslim authority, was entrusted with the task of negotiating with the Khālsā. He reached Amritsar where the Sikhs had been allowed to assemble and celebrate the festival of Baisākhī after many years of exile, and offered them on behalf of the government the title of Nawāb and a *jāgīr* consisting of the *parganahs* of Dīpālpur, Kanganvāl and Jhabāl.

After some mutual discussion, the Sikhs accepted the offer. The Khālsā commonwealth, reared from the beginning on a republican principle, was now faced with the question of choosing a fit person to be invested with the title of Nawāb. Kapūr Singh, who delighted in simple deeds of service when he was not fighting, was trying to soften the rigours of a hot summer's day by stirring the air over the assembly with a hand-fan. All eyes centred on him and he was, with one accord, selected for the honour.

Kapūr Singh was reluctant, but he could not deny the unanimous will of the Panth. As a mark of respect, he placed the robe of honour sent by the Mughals at the feet of five revered Sikhs—Bhāī Harī Singh Hazūrīā, Bābā Dīp Singh Shahīd, Sardār Jassā Singh Rāmgarhīā, Bhāī Karam Singh and

Sardār Buddhā Singh, great-great-grandfather of Mahārājā Ranjīt Singh—before putting it on. The dress included a shawl, a turban, a jewelled plume, a pair of gold bangles, a necklace, a row of pearls, a brocade garment and a sword.

Nawāb Kapūr Singh looked magnificent in this regalia. But he had lost none of his native humility. The first request he made to his comrades after the investiture was that he should not be deprived of his old privilege of serving in the community kitchen.

Word was sent round to Sikhs passing their days in distant jungles and deserts that peace had been made with the government and that they could return to their homes. Nawāb Kapūr Singh undertook to consolidate the disintegrated fabric of the Sikh organization. The whole body of the Khālsā was formed into two sections—Buddhā Dal, the army of the veterans, and Tarunā Dal, the army of the young. The former was entrusted with the task of looking after the holy places, preaching the Guru's word and inducting converts into the Khālsā Panth by holding baptismal ceremonies. Nawāb Kapūr Singh was himself in charge of this section. The Tarunā Dal was the more active division and its function was to fight in times of emergency.

Nawāb Kapūr Singh's personality was the common link between these two wings. He was universally esteemed for his high character. His word was obeyed willingly and to receive baptism at his hands was counted an act of rare merit. But he was so humble by temperament that he always thought of his position among his people to be a gift from them rather than the result of any qualities he possessed. Once Jassā Singh Āhlūwālīā, who, owing to some years spent in Delhi, had the habit of mixing Urdu with his Punjabi, complained to him that some of his companions had given him the derisive nickname of *Ham-ko-tum-ko*. "Why should you mind what the Khālsā say," said Kapūr Singh, "for you do not know their ways. In their kindness, they bestowed Nawābship upon me and might one day make a Pādshāh (king) of you!" Jassā Singh came to be known as Pādshāh from that day. The word became a title of endearment and authority when Jassā Singh, as leader of the Dal Khālsā, occupied Lahore in 1761. He was proclaimed by the Sikhs Sultān-ul-Qaum, the King of the Nation.

The Tarunā Dal rapidly grew in strength and soon numbered more than 12,000. To ensure efficient control, Nawāb Kapūr Singh split it into five parts, each with a separate centre. The first batch was led by Bābā Dīp Singh Shahīd, the second by Karam Singh and Dharam Singh, the third by Kāhn Singh and Binod Singh of Goindwāl, the fourth by Dasaundhā Singh of Kot Buddhā and the fifth by Vīr Singh Ranghretā and Jīvan Singh Ranghretā. Each batch had its own banner and drum, and formed the nucleus of a separate political state. The territories conquered by these groups were entered in their respective papers at Akāl Takht by Jassā Singh Āhlūwālīā, one of the fewest literate *sardārs*. From these documents or *misls*, the principalities carved out by them came to be known as Misls. Seven more groups were formed subsequently and, towards the close of the century, there were altogether twelve Sikh Misls ruling between them the land of the Five Waters.

The entente with the Mughals did not last long and, before the harvest of 1735, Zakariyā Khān, the governor of Lahore, sent a force and occupied the *jāgīr*. The Sikhs were driven away towards the Mālwā by Lakhpat Rāi, the Hindu minister at the Mughal court at Lahore. They were welcomed by Ālā Singh, leader of the Phūlkīān Misl, who took the opportunity of receiving *pāhul*, Sikh baptism, from Nawāb Kapūr Singh. The latter continued his missionary and military activities in the cis-Sutlej parts. Another important chief to take the baptism at his hands was Hamīr Singh, an ancestor of the Farīdkot family. During his sojourn in the Mālwā, Nawāb Kapūr Singh conquered the territory of Sunām and made it over to Ālā Singh. He also attacked Sirhind and defeated the Mughal governor.

Nawāb Kapūr Singh led the Sikhs back to the Mājhā to celebrate the Divālī at Amritsar. But he was defeated by Diwān Lakhpat Rāi's army near Amritsar and forced to turn away. The Tarunā Dal promptly came to his help. The combined force fell upon Lakhpat Rāi before he could reach Lahore and inflicted upon him a severe defeat. His nephew. Dunī Chand, and two important *faujdārs*, Jamāl Khān and Tātār Khān, were killed in the battle.

In the summer of 1739, Nādir Shāh, the Persian invader, was returning home after a hearty plunder of Delhi

and the Punjab. With a view to avoiding the heat of the plains, he kept close to the hills on the backward journey. The Khālsā Dal lay not far from the route he had taken. When he reached Akhnūr, on the River Chenāb, they swooped down upon the rearguard, relieving the invaders of much of their booty. On the third night, they made an even fiercer attack and rescued from their hands a large number of Hindu girls who were restored to their families. For many a long mile, the Sikhs pursued Nādir in this manner.

Zakariyā Khān continued to carry out his policy of repression with redoubled zeal. A pitiless campaign for a manhunt was started. Sikhs' heads sold for money and the Mughals offered a prize for each head brought to them. According to Ratan Singh Bhangū, *Prāchīn Panth Prakāsh*, "He who informed where a Sikh was received ten rupees; he who killed one received fifty."

To cut off the Sikhs from the main source of their inspiration, the Harimandir at Amritsar was taken possession of and guarded by Mughal troops to prevent them visiting it. Sikhs were then living in exile in the Sivālik hills, in Lakkhī Jungle and in the sandy deserts of Rajputana. To assert their right to ablution in the holy tank at Amritsar, they would occasionally send riders, who, in disguise or openly cutting their way through armed guards, would reach the temple, take a dip in the tank and ride back with lightning speed. Many a heroic tale of such daring adventure is recounted, the most dramatic and valorous being that of Mahtāb Singh of Mīrānkot and Sukkhā Singh. These intrepid spirits set out from their desert resorts in Rajputana to avenge the sacrilege perpetrated by Massā Ranghar, the Muslim chieftain, who had occupied the Amritsar shrine and converted it into a nautch-house. Dressed as Muhammadans, Mahtāb Singh and Sukkhā Singh, with bags full of stone-pebbles on their arms, entered the precincts, ostensibly to deposit the land revenue they pretended to have collected. While Sukkhā Singh stood guard at the door, Mahtāb Singh went inside and suddenly fell upon Massā Ranghar and his revellers. Massā was killed on the spot and, before his companions realized what had happened, both Mahtāb Singh and Sukkhā Singh were gone out of harm's way. This occurred on May 6, 1740.

The governor of Lahore, Zakariyā Khān, sent a strong force under Samad Khān to seek out the Sikhs. When the latter heard that Samad Khān was pursuing them, they came out to fight him to settle an old score. The Mughal force was severely punished and their leader killed. Samad Khān had been the target of Sikhs' wrath since he had, on June 24, 1734, executed with torture, hacking bone by bone, Bhāī Manī Singh, the learned and pious high priest of the Harimandir. Manī Singh's grandfather, Ballū, eleven[1] of his twelve brothers, and seven[2] of his ten sons died martyrs either on the field of battle or at the hands of the executioners.

Nawāb Kapūr Singh now made a plan to capture Zakariyā Khān. With a force, 2,000 strong, dressed in green, their hair hanging loosely behind in Muslim style and a green Muslim banner leading them, he entered the city and went on to the Shāhī Mosque where, according to intelligence received, the Mughal governor was expected to attend the afternoon prayer. But Zakariyā Khān did not visit the mosque. Kapūr Singh was disappointed at the failure of his mission. Throwing off the disguise and shouting their usual war cries of *satsrīakāl*, the Sikhs marched out of Lahore and vanished into their jungle homes.

This difficult period is full of countless other deeds of heroism and sacrifice. A passion for martyrdom seemed to have gripped the Sikhs. To die for their faith and for their Guru was their ruling impulse. As says the *Prāchīn Panth Prakāsh*, "Sikhs had a fondness for death. To court death they had now found the opportunity. Their lives they held not dear. They did not feel the pain if their bodies were slashed.

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[1]Jethā Singh (martyred at Ālowāl on October 11, 1711), Dyāl Dās (martyred in Delhi on November 11, 1675), Manī Singh (martyred in Lahore on June 24, 1734), Dān Singh (martyred at Chamkaur on December 7, 1705), Mān Singh (martyred at Chitorgarh on April 3, 1708), Rūp Singh (martyred at Ālowāl on October 11, 1711), Jagat Singh (martyred at Lahore on June 24, 1734), Sohan Chand (martyred at Nadaun on March 20, 1691), Lahnā Singh (martyred at Guler on February 20, 1696), Rāi Singh (martyred at Muktsar on December 30, 1705), and Hathī Chand (martyred at Bhangānī on September 18, 1688).

[2]Chitar Singh (martyred at Lahore on June 24, 1734), Bachittar Singh (martyred at Kotlā Nihang on December 8, 1705), Ude Singh (martyred at Shāhī Tibbī on December 6, 1705), Anik Singh (martyred at Chamkaur on December 7, 1705), Ajab Singh (martyred at Chamkaur on December 7, 1705), Ajaib Singh (martyred at Chamkaur on December 7, 1705), and Gurbakhsh Singh (martyred at Lahore on June 24, 1734).

They took to arms vowed to death." "To martyrdom are we wedded. We turn not our backs upon it," sang the Sikhs.

To quote the *Prāchīn Panth Prakāsh* again, "Once Nādir asked Zakariyā Khān, 'Tell me who these raiders are. They who plunder my highways. I shall reduce their country to ashes.' The Nawāb answered, 'Their country is nowhere marked. They get their sleep standing; they eat their food while marching. They stop not in villages. They know not the taste of salt or *ghee*. We torment them; yet they flourish. Long summer days they pass without water. In winter they get no fire to warm themselves. They do not have access to ground corn to eat. They run to fight. One battles like a hundred. Death they fear not. Devoutly they cherish to die for their faith. We have become tired of killing them, but they are far from finished.' Nādir further queried: 'Whose followers are they? Who is their prophet? Or, are they sprung without any spiritual direction?' 'To Guru Nānak they owe their origin,' said Zakariyā Khān."

Just to prove to the world that the Sikhs had not been annihilated or vanquished, one Boṭā Singh stood in the most important highway in the Punjab, club in hand, levying a tax on all passersby. This act of derring-do had challenging implications. It amounted to the establishment by an individual of a State—a declaration of sovereignty which, as the Sikhs sang in those grim times, had been assigned to them by God Himself. Finding that everybody was tamely submitting to this demand, Bhāī Botā Singh sent a letter to the governor of Lahore himself. The latter despatched a body of soldiers to overpower him. Botā Singh, along with his companion, Garjā Singh, a Ranghretā Sikh, fell fighting valiantly. This happened in 1739.

There were innumerable other instances of such pure and defiant heroism. Thus does the *Prāchīn Panth Prakāsh* narrate the story of Bhāī Tārū Singh: "Once the governor of Lahore asked his men, 'From where do the Sikhs obtain their nourishment? I have debarred them from all occupations. They realize no taxes. They do not farm, nor are they allowed to do business or join public employment. I have stopped all offerings to their *gurdwārās*. No provisions or supplies are accessible to them. Why do they not die of sheer starvation? My troops bar their way. They search for them and they kill them where

they see them. I have burnt down entire villages with Sikh populations. I have destroyed their remotest kin. I have ferreted them out of the holes and slaughtered them. The Mughals are hawks; the Sikhs are like quail. Vast numbers of them have been ensnared and killed. No one can live without food. I know not how the Sikhs survive without it?'

"Harbhagat Niranjaniā, who was a sworn foe of the Sikhs, answered, 'There are Sikhs in this world who would not eat until they have fed their brethren. They may themselves go without clothes and food, but cannot bear their comrades' distress. They will pass the cold season by fireside and send them their own clothes. Some will sweat to grind corn and have it sent to them. They will do the roughest chores to earn a small wage for their sake. They migrate to distant places to eke out money for their brothers in exile.'

"The Nawāb shook his head in despair, 'They are unyielding people indeed. Their annihilation is beyond our power. God alone will destroy them.' Harbhagat Niranjaniā spoke again, 'In the village of Pūhlā, in Mājhā, lives one Tārū Singh. He tills his land and pays the revenue to the official. He eats but little and sends what he saves to his brothers in the jungles. He has his mother and a sister who both toil and grind to make a living. They eat sparingly and they wear the coarsest homespun. Whatever they save, they pass on to the Sikhs. Besides the Sikhs, they own none other. They recite the hymns of their Gurus. Death they do not dread. They visit not the Gangā or the Jamunā. They bathe in the tank constructed by their own Guru.' "

An officer was immediately sent with soldiers to apprehend Tārū Singh. Tārū Singh was captured and brought to Lahore. He was thrown into gaol where he was given many tortures. But, says the *Prāchīn Panth Prakāsh*, "as the Turks tormented Tārū Singh, ruddier became his cheeks with joy. As he was starved of food and drink, contentment reigned on his face. He was happy in the Guru's will."

Eventually, Tārū Singh was presented before the Nawāb. He greeted him with the Sikh salutation, *Wāhigurū jī kā Khālsā, Wāhigurū jī kī Fateh*, defiantly uttered. The Nawāb felt startled "as if some one had slit his finger and sprinkled salt on it."

Tārū Singh spoke out, "If we till your lands, we pay the revenue. If we engage in commerce, we pay taxes. What is left after our payments to you is for our bellies. What we save from our mouths, we give our brethren. We take nothing from you. Why do you then punish us?" The Nawāb was in a rage and pronounced, "If you become a Musalman, then alone will I remit your life."

"How do I fear for my life? Why must I become a Musalman? Don't Musalmans die? Why should I abandon my faith? May my faith endure until my last hair—until my last breath," said Tārū Singh.

The Nawāb tried to tempt him with offers of lands and wealth. When he found Tārū Singh inflexible, he decided to have his scalp scraped from his head. The barbers came with sharp lancets and slowly ripped Bhāī Tārū Singh's skull. He rejoiced that the hair of his head was still intact.

Bhāī Tārū Singh's martyrdom took place on July 1, 1745.

To destroy the defiant race, the Mughal governor of Lahore and his minister, Lakhpat Rāi, launched an all-out campaign and set forth with a large army. The latter's consuming passion to avenge the death of his brother, Jaspat Rāi, who had died in a battle with the Sikhs, put a sharp edge of personal malevolence on the adventure. The Sikhs were brought to bay in a dense bush near Kāhnūwān, in Gurdāspur district. They put up a determined fight, but were overwhelmed by the superior numbers of the enemy and scattered with heavy losses. They were chased into the hills and hunted down. More than seven thousand Sikhs lost their lives. "To complete his revenge," says Syad Muhammad Latif, the Muslim historian of the Punjab, "Lakhpat Rāi brought with him 1,000 Sikhs in irons to Lahore, and having compelled them to ride on donkeys, bare-backed, paraded them in the bazars. They were, then, taken to the horse-market, outside Delhi Gate, and there beheaded one after another without mercy." So indiscriminate and, considering the total Sikh population in those days, so extensive was the killing that the campaign is known in Sikh history as a Ghallūghārā or holocaust.

In 1748, a section of the Dal Khālsā, under Charhat Singh, grandfather of Ranjīt Singh, gave chase to the fleeing troops of Ahmad Shāh Durrānī, the Afghan invader of India. Another,

at the instance of Nawāb Kapūr Singh, decided to march towards Amritsar. Nawāb Kapūr Singh entrusted the command of this campaign to Jassā Singh Āhlūwālīā.

The Sikhs were able to celebrate Baisākhī (March 29, 1748) at Amritsar after a long interval. On this occasion, Nawāb Kapūr Singh begged the Khālsā to relieve him of his office, and, at his suggestion, Jassā Singh Āhlūwālīā was chosen the supreme commander of the Dal Khālsā.

For nearly a quarter of a century, Nawāb Kapūr Singh had led the Sikhs through most trying times. Few men had ever to contend with heavier odds; few ever engaged in such an unequal fight. Yet, striving valiantly, he step by step built up the sovereignty of the Khālsā and, by the time he retired, he had conferred on the Dal the lineaments of an independent State. In the midst of this lifelong preoccupation with war and fighting, he maintained irreproachable moral standards and was universally admired for his devout and heroic spirit.

CHAPTER IX

TURN IN HISTORY

Ahmad Shāh Durrānī's repeated invasions brought further chaos to the Punjab and added to the perplexities of the Delhi kingdom. In the dissipation of the Mughal authority, the Sikhs had the opportunity of extending their influence and assuming power as successors to Muslim rule in northern India. But before this could happen, they had to pass through another terrible ordeal of fire and blood. By their stern and obstinate opposition to Ahmad Shāh and constant harassment of his armies and his viceregents in the Punjab, they had earned the dire wrath of the Afghan emperor who came out more than once pledged to exacting vengeance and scourging the entire sect.

Before Ahmad Shāh launched his onslaughts against them, the Sikhs had been through another spell of tyranny and persecution at the hands of the governor of Lahore. Mīr Mannū (1748-53) proved a worse foe of the Sikhs than his predecessors, Abdus Samad Khān (1713-26), Zakariyā Khān (1726-45), and Yāhiyā Khān (1745-47), and started the witch-hunt with even greater fierceness and severity. Sikhs—men, women and children—were apprehended from wherever his soldiers could lay their hands on them and brought to Lahore for daily executions. So ruthless was Mannū's campaign against them that his name passed into contemporary folklore. The Sikhs called him their "sickle", which mowed them mercilessly. "But the more the sickle mows, the more we multiply," they sang defiantly.

To quote Giānī Giān Singh's *Panth Prakāsh*, "Ahmad Shāh once saw upon the field of battle only four Sikhs as against fourteen Afghans killed in action. He was struck with amazement to see the sight, and told his minister that such brave warriors as the Sikhs were not meant for slaughter. The Qāzī who happened to be present spoke with clasped hands,

"If to our faith they would convert, they ought not to be killed. But in case they do not, they should be destroyed without hesitation.' Thereupon many from among the crowd said with one voice, 'Of what avail will this conversion be? They will not stay in the fold, and the Sikhs, their brothers, will forthwith welcome them back into their faith.' Peculiar indeed is their sect. They do not wed by Hindu custom, nor by *nikāh* of the Muslims. Their nuptials are joyously made by the ceremony of *anand*. Let a man or woman from among them die, they will without delay prepare *karāhprasād* and distribute it. They follow not the Hindu obsequies, and do not consign the remains of their dead to the Gangā. They have instead the Guru Granth read through, concluding the recitation on the tenth day. They will thereupon give food and clothes to the poor. They themselves accept not charity, and they eat what they earn by the labour of their own hands. They will not deceive anyone. They kill and loot openly, and they consider men of all four castes equal. After they have had *amrit*, the elixir of their faith, they all become brothers and regard one another dearer than their own mothers, fathers and sons. Amongst themselves they admit no distinctions, and they are ready always to sacrifice themselves and all they possess for the sake of the fellow Sikhs. They wear not the *janeū*, nor receive the *tilak*. They do not render obeisance to images. One God they believe in. Instead of the Vedas, the Purānas and the Quran, they read and hear the sayings of Guru Nānak."

Sikh women were seized from their homes. "They were," to quote Giānī Giān Singh again, "put to grind corn in gaol. Many were given merciless lashing. No one, nevertheless, dared utter an unchaste word in their presence. Yet if any one tried, they would fall upon him with scorching rebuke. Each one of the detenus was given a maund-and-a-quarter of grain to grind in a day. Exhausted from thirst and hunger, they plied their stonemills. They plied their stonemills, and they sang their Gurus' hymns. The Hindu or the Muslim, or in fact anyone who saw them and listened to their songs was utterly astonished. As their children, hungry and thirsty, wailed and writhed on the ground for a morsel, the helpless prisoners in the clutches of tyrants could do but little except solace them with their affection. Wearied from crying, the hungry children would at

last go to sleep. The women then remembered their Guru: 'O Master of the Plume, the Purifier of the Impure, Guru Gobind Singh! We helpless ones seek shelter at thy feet. Do, pray, protect our honour.' "

There were instances of children being hacked to pieces in front of their mothers. The bits of flesh hung on strings were thrown round their necks like garlands. Several times daily, wherever the Sikhs pray, individually or in groups, the fortitude and heroism of those brave women are recalled with reverence.

The Sikhs were especially the target of Ahmad Shāh's sixth incursion into India. News had reached him in Afghanistan of the defeat, after his withdrawal from the country, of his general, Nūr-ud-Dīn Bāmezaī, at the hands of the Sikhs who were fast spreading themselves out over the Punjab and had declared their leader, Jassā Singh Āhlūwālīā, king of Lahore (1761). To rid his Indian dominions of them once for all, he set out from Kandahar. Marching with alacrity, he overtook the Sikhs as they were withdrawing into the Mālwā after crossing the Sutlej. This moving caravan comprised a substantial portion of the total Sikh population and contained, besides active fighters, a large body of old men, women and children who were being escorted to the safety of the interior of the country.

Surprised by Ahmad Shāh, the Sikhs threw a cordon round those who needed protection, and prepared for the battle. In this formation and continuing their march, they fought the invaders and their Indian allies desperately. Jassā Singh, Ālā Singh's *kotvāl*, Sekhū Singh, Charhat Singh, Harī Singh and Nāhar Singh, led their forces with skill and courage. Jassā Singh Āhlūwālīā sustained twenty-two wounds on his body in this action and Charhat Singh rode to exhaustion five of his horses one after another. Ahmad Shāh succeeded, in the end, in breaking through the ring and glutted his spite by carrying out a full-scale butchery. His orders were for everyone in Indian dress to be killed at sight. The soldiers of the governor of Sirhind fighting for him were to wear green leaves of trees on their heads to distinguish themselves from the Sikhs.

Near the village of Kup, nine kilometres from Mālerkotlā,

about 15,000 Sikhs lay on that ghastly field at the end of a single day's action (February 5, 1762). In this battle, known in Sikh history as Waddā Ghallūghārā, the Great Killing, which relegated the ealier Kāhnūwān massacre to its Chhotā or minor counterpart, was also lost the volume of the Guru Granth prepared by Guru Gobind Singh at Damdamā Sāhib.

Even such a disaster as had overtaken them at Kup caused no despondency among the Sikhs. When the survivors of the Great Carnage assembled in the evening for their community prayer, a Sikh got up and said, "No harm done, Khālsājī! The Panth has emerged purer from the trial; the alloy has been eliminated." Within four months of the Ghallūghārā, the Sikhs had inflicted a severe defeat on the governor of Sirhind. Four months later, they were celebrating Divālī in the Harimandir which the Shāh had demolished, and were fighting with him again a pitched battle forcing him to withdraw from Amritsar under cover of darkness (October 17, 1762). After this quick action, the Sikhs once again retired into Lakkhī Jungle. There was no further fighting with Ahmad Shāh, who left Lahore for Afghanistan on December 12, 1762.

Although the Punjab was claimed to be part of the dominions of Ahmad Shāh who had appointed his nominees, Kābulī Mall and Zain Khān, as governors in Lahore and Sirhind respectively, the shadow of the expanding Sikh authority spread across the entire country. The Afghan governors were helpless witnesses to this dramatic process of changing fortunes. While a batch of Sikhs remained in Amritsar under the leadership of Charhat Singh to cleanse the holy tank and rebuild the temple, destroyed and desecrated by Ahmad Shāh, the rest of them went about establishing their own *thānās* and fortresses in the country. How the Sikh *sardārs* set their seal of authority on the territories they acquired is graphically described by Joseph Davey Cunningham. "Riding day and night," says he in his *A History of the Sikhs*, "each horseman would throw his belt and scabbard, his articles of dress and accoutrement, until he was almost naked, into successive villages, to mark them as his." These acquisitions were then recorded in the papers of each *sardār* at the Akāl Takht at Amritsar.

The Sikhs thus liberated the Punjab from foreign rule inch by inch and became the redeemers of India's honour and independ-

ence. Once, while the Sarbatt Khālsā was assembled in a diet at the Akāl Takht on the occasion of Baisākhī (April 10, 1763), some Brahman inhabitants of Kasūr, an Afghan stronghold in the neighbourhood of Lahore, came with a complaint that the wife of one of them had been forcibly snatched by the Afghan chieftain, Usmān Khān. Harī Singh Bhangī and Charhat Singh at once prepared to go out to Kasūr to punish the tyrant. Usmān Khān, who was engaged by the Sikh force, was killed and the Brahman woman was restored to her husband. The town was laid waste and the Sikhs acquired considerable amount of booty.

On the Divālī day, November 4, 1763, news reached Sikhs at Amritsar that one of Ahmad Shāh Durrānī's generals, Jahān Khān, was coming out with an army. Suspending work on the construction of the Harimandir, they went forward to bar his way. Charhat Singh and the Bhangī *sardārs*, Jhandā Singh and Gujjar Singh, routed Jahān Khān in a contest at Siālkot. The Afghan general fled back to Peshawar and a number of his relatives and dependants fell into the hands of the Sikhs. "But as the Sikhs of old would not lay their hands on women," says Alī-ud-Dīn in his *Ibratnāmah*, "they sent them safely to Jammu." This evidence of a Muslim historian attests the scrupulous standards of chivalry Sikhs observed even in those chaotic and adverse times.

The Sikhs crossed the Sutlej under the command of Jassā Singh Āhlūwālīā. They took a bloody vengeance on Bhīkhan Khān of Mālerkotlā for the part he had played in the Ghallūghārā. They then pushed their arms up to Sirhind, accurst from its association with the massacre of the two infant sons of Guru Gobind Singh. The Afghan governor, Zain Khān, was killed in battle and the town given up to plunder. The spot where the Guru's sons had been martyred was marked out and a *gurdwārā*, called Fatehgarh Sāhib, the Fort of Victory, was built there. Since none of the *sardārs* was willing to accept possession of Sirhind, it was made over to Bhāī Buddhā Singh, one of Guru Gobind Singh's old followers. The town was later purchased from him by Mahārājā Ālā Singh of Patiālā, and till 1948 it remained part of the state he had founded.

The Sikhs now had a free run of the country and they ranged abroad unchecked obtaining surrender of far-flung

provinces. The Sukkarchakkīās, the Nakais, the Kanhaiyās and the Rāmgarhīās returned to the north of the Sutlej. They took the Jullundur Doāb and advanced towards Lahore. Jassā Singh Āhlūwālīā, along with Karorā Singh, Baghel Singh and Gurbakhsh Singh, crossed the Jamunā and captured Sahāranpur (February 20, 1764). The Sikhs overran the territory of Najīb-ud-Daulāh, the Ruhilā chief, and returned after realizing from him a tribute of eleven lakhs of rupees. The Sikhs carried their arms into Mughal Delhi itself. A modern historian, Dr Hari Ram Gupta, has listed fifteen such raids between January 1765 and August 1787. On March 11, 1783, Sikhs entered the Red Fort, and installed Jassā Singh Āhlūwālīā on the throne in the Diwān-i-Ām, calling him Bādshāh Singh, though he withdrew himself on being challenged by Jassā Singh Rāmgarhīā. The emperor made peace with the Sikhs and allowed Baghel Singh to build *gurdwārās* on the seven historical sites associated with the Sikh faith. Sikh agents were appointed at Delhi to collect *rākhī* of crown-lands and octroi duties of the city. Dr. Harī Rām Guptā makes the point that, contrary to what happened in raids by other powers which were frequent in those uncertain times, during those attacks by Sikhs there was not a single instance of a woman having been molested.

Jassā Singh Āhlūwālīā came to Amritsar to make obeisance at the Harimandir and offer his share towards the rebuilding of the temple. Charhat Singh Sukkarchakkīā and Gujjar Singh Bhangī secured a crucial victory over Sarbuland Khān, the Afghan *faujdār* of Rohtās. Sarbuland Khān fell a captive into the hands of the Sikhs who treated him with magnanimity. So deeply was he impressed with the consideration shown him by Charhat Singh Sukkarchakkīā that he offered to serve as a governor under him if the *sardār* proclaimed himself king. "The kingship is already conferred on us by the Guru," said the *sardār*, "but we want to keep you a prisoner so that the world may know that Charhat Singh has captured the uncle of the Shāh." "There is a still greater distinction in releasing me," said Sarbuland Khān. "For, they will say that Charhat Singh captured the uncle of Ahmad Shāh and, then, set him at liberty." The Khān paid the tribute and was allowed to return to his country.

The Sikh insurrection in the Punjab caused grave dismay to

Ahmad Shāh. He planned yet another crusade and, inviting his Baluch ally, Amīr Nāsir Khān, to join him in the adventure, he wrote, "How can you think of going to Mecca while this depraved sect is causing havoc? You should march from that side while I am moving from this, so that we may destroy these people root and branch. *Jihād* (holy war) against these idolaters, you may rest assured, is more meritorious than *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca)...."

Ahmad Shāh started from Afghanistan at the head of a strong army in October 1764. The Sikhs, following their usual tactics, withdrew out of the invader's way, retiring into their jungle haunts. The Durrānī reached Lahore and, on December 1, 1764, attacked Amritsar which he had destroyed and polluted several times before to gratify his own malice and to seal the source of Sikhs' religious and moral replenishment. A small batch of thirty Sikhs stood ready to face the might of the Afghan emperor and lay down their lives to protect their holy shrine. These intrepid warriors from the band of Gurbakhsh Singh Shahīd desperately charged at Afghan and Baluch armies. "They had neither the fear of slaughter nor the dread of death," says Qāzī Nūr Muhammad, the author of *Jang-nāmah*, who happened to be in the imperial train accompanying the Baluch division. "They grappled with the *ghāzīs*, spilt their own blood and sacrificed their lives for their Guru."

Ahmad Shāh came down to Sirhind without encountering anywhere the main body of the Khālsā. This time he went no farther than Sirhind. As he was marching homeward through the Jullundur Doāb, the Sikh *sardārs*, including Jassā Singh Āhlūwālīā, Jassā Singh Rāmgarhīā, Charhat Singh Sukkarchakkīā, Jhandā Singh Bhangī and Jai Singh Kanhaiyā, kept a close trail constantly raiding the imperial caravan. These series of depredations caused great annoyance to the Shāh who lost much of his baggage to the Sikhs. The floods in the River Chenāb took a further toll of his men and property, and he returned to Afghanistan mauled and considerably shaken.

The Sikhs resumed their territories and reasserted their authority in the country. On the Baisākhī day, April 10, 1765, barely a fortnight after the Durrānī had left, they took counsel at Amritsar and resolved to capture Lahore. The Bhangīs, Lahnā Singh and Gujjar Singh, moved out with two thousand

Sikhs. Kābulī Mall, who was the governor of Lahore on behalf of the Afghans, was then in Jammu. His nephew, Amīr Singh, submitted without much resistance and the Sikhs became masters of the capital of the Punjab on April 16, 1765. This they regarded as a special gift bestowed on them by the Guru and struck coin quoting, in gratitude, the Persian inscription from Bandā Singh's seal.

The fear of his Indian empire falling to the Sikhs continued to obsess the Shāh's mind and he led out yet another punitive campaign against them towards the close of 1766. This was his eighth invasion into India. The Sikhs had recourse to their old game of hide-and-seek. They vacated Lahore, but faced squarely the Afghan general, Jahān Khān, at Amritsar, forcing him to retreat, with six thousand of the Durrānī soldiers killed. Ahmad Shāh offered the governorship of Lahore to the Bhangī *sardār* Lahnā Singh, but the latter declined the proposal. He returned to the Shāh the fruit he had sent him, saying that such delicacies were meant for royalty. The Sikhs, he told the messenger, lived on parched gram. Of this he gave a quantity to the messenger to be presented to Ahmad Shāh on his behalf.

Jassā Singh Āhlūwālīā, with an army of thirty thousand Sikhs, roamed in the neighbourhood of the Afghan camp plundering it to his heart's content. Never before had Ahmad Shāh felt so helpless. In the words of a contemporary news-writer: "The Shāh's influence is confined merely to those tracts which are covered by his army. The *zamīndārs* appear in general so well affected towards the Sikhs that it is usual with the latter to repair by night to the villages where they find every refreshment. By day they retire from them and again fall to harassing the Shāh's troops. If the Shāh remains between the two rivers Beās and Sutlej, the Sikhs will continue to remain in the neighbourhood, but if he passes over towards Sirhind, the Sikhs will then become masters of the parts he leaves behind him."

The outcome of the unequal, but bitter, contest now lay clearly in favour of the Sikhs. The aging Shāh had realized that his Indian dominions were at the mercy of the Sikhs and he bowed to the inevitable. His own soldiers were getting restive and the summer heat of the Punjab was becoming unbearable. He, at last, decided to return home, but took a different route

this time to avoid molestation by the Sikhs. As soon as Ahmad Shāh retired, the Sikhs reoccupied their territories. The entire country between the Indus and the Jamunā owned Sikhs' supremacy.

Twelve Sikh independencies, known as Misls, had formed in this process of Punjab's emancipation. The Āhlūwālīās, who derived their title from the village in which their leader Jassā Singh was born, held territory in the neighbourhood of Kapūrthalā, in the Jullundur Doāb, and some villages in the Mājhā such as Sarhālī, Jandiālā, Bundālā, Vairowāl and Fatehābād. The Bhangīs, owned Siālkot, Gujrāt, Multān, Amritsar, Tarn Tāran and Lahore. The Rāmgarhīās who took their name from Rāmgarh (originally, Rām Raunī), the Sikh fort at Amritsar, had in their possession Qādīān, Batālā and Srī Hargobindpur, in the Bārī Doāb, and Miānī, Sarīh and Urmur Tāndā, in the Jullundur Doāb. To Singhpurīās belonged Jullundur and the villages of Banūr, Ghanaulī, Manaulī and Bharatgarh, in the Mālwā. The Sukkarchakkīās possessed Gujrānwālā and parts of Pothohār and the Kanhaiyās the *parganah* of Batālā. The Shahīds, descendants of honoured martyr Bābā Dīp Singh, had their possessions in the present districts of Ambālā (*parganah* of Shāhzādpur) and Sahāranpur. The Nakaīs ruled over the country south of Lahore, between the Rāvī and the Sutlej, and the Dallewālīās, under Tārā Singh Ghaibā, held Rāhon, Mahatpur, Nawānshahar and Phillaur, in the Jullundur Doāb. The Nishānwālās, standard-bearers of the Khālsā army, had their centre at Ambālā. The Karorsinghīās, adopting the name of their leader, Karorā Singh, took Hoshiārpur and the surrounding district. The Phūlkīāns embraced the territories of Patiālā, Sirhind, Nābhā and Jīnd.

What impelled these Sikh confederacies to united and zealous action was their faith in the common destiny of the Khālsā. Any call for a joint cause was joyfully answered and the greatest sacrifices willingly made for its realization. Their living conviction that the Guru had invested them with moral and temporal dignity and charged them with the duty of liberating the country imparted an element of philanthropy to their extremely dangerous and heroic adventure.

To die fighting for the Panth was the consummation most cheerfully sought; to compromise with evil and injustice was

considerd the extreme of degradation and pusillanimity. This brave new spirit created a revolutionary impulse in the country. The Sikhs thus gave a new direction to the course of Indian history. When Shāh Zamān, the grandson of Ahmad Shāh Durrānī, reached Peshawar on January 30, 1799, harassed and plundered by the Sikhs on his homeward journey after his Indian adventure, history had taken a decisive turn. No more Muslim invaders came into India from the north-west as had been happening for more than a thousand years.

Though the times were troublous and uncertain and the Misldār *sardārs* remained engaged in endless fighting, they preserved in their territories "good order and a regular government." To quote Sir Jadunath Sarkar, "The Sikhs had now established their rule over much of the Punjab and given to the people of that province internal security and the promotion of agriculture in a degree unknown for sixty years past." Writing in 1776 in what is the first account of the Sikhs by a European, Colonel A.L.H. Polier, a Swiss officer in the service of the East India Company, said, "The extensive and fertile territories of the Sikhs, and their attachment and application, in the midst of warfare, to the occupations of agriculture must evidently produce a large revenue. The districts dependent on Lahore, in the reign of Aurangzib, produced, according to Bernier, a revenue of two hundred forty-six lacs and ninety-five thousand rupees; and we are naturally led to suppose from the industrious skill of the Seikhs in the various branches of cultivation that no great decrease of that amount can have taken place since the Punjab has fallen into their possession."

Themselves victims of the worst kind of religious tyranny, the leaders of the Sikh Misls established a just and humane rule. They treated the Muslims generously and made no distinctions among their subjects on the grounds of caste or religion. In times of distress they helped them alike. In 1783, when the Punjab was stricken by a severe famine, the Sikh chiefs opened *langars* to feed the needy. Speaking about a Sikh chief of the area, a report quoted in the *Montgomery District Gazetteer* says, "The famines of A.D. 1783 occurred in Budh Singh's time. He is said to have sold all his property, and to have fed the people with grain from the proceeds."

CHAPTER X

MAN OF DESTINY

The principalities the Sikhs had carved out were integrated into the sovereign State of the Khālsā by Ranjīt Singh. Born heir to one of these confederacies, he had the foresight to visualize a united Sikh kingdom. By his superior military genius and political acumen, he succeeded in integrating the existing Misls and joining the people of the Punjab into a strong nation.

Ranjīt Singh was born at Gujrānwālā, now in Pakistan, on November 13, 1780, in a family which had distinguished itself by its warlike exploits. One of his ancestors, Buddhā Singh, had spent most of his years in battle and bore on his body the scars of forty wounds by spear, sword and matchlock. Ranjīt Singh's grandfather, Charhat Singh, struck against Ahmad Shāh Durrānī's armies several times and won renown as a fearless fighter. He added to his family's power and possessions and left his son, Mahān Singh, master of a considerable estate.

Some fifty years before Ranjīt Singh's birth, his ancestors had built a small fort in their village, Sukkarchakk, to keep off raiders and dacoits. No one then knew that from that fortress would arise a power which would establish peace and order and set up a mighty rule in the Punjab. From the village Sukkarchakk the family came to be known as Sukkarchakkīā.

Budh Singh was the name given Ranjīt Singh by his mother. But his father, who received the news of the birth of a son as he was coming home victorious from a battle, called him Ranjīt Singh—Victor in Battle. This name endured and proved true to his character and foretold his career of conquest and victory.

Ranjīt Singh was fond of manly sports. He rode and swam a great deal and went out hunting. He gave little attention to learning, but mastered the art of war. This was the equipment

which every youth of spirit aspired after in those tumultuous times.

Young Ranjīt Singh accompanied his father on expeditions. Once he joined him in an attack on the fort of Manchar which belonged to the Chatthās who were old rivals of the family of Ranjīt Singh. Mahān Singh's army invested the fort. All of a sudden, Hashmat Khān, the uncle of the Chatthā chief, clambered on to the elephant on which Ranjīt Singh was riding. The latter showed great presence of mind and, before Hashmat Khān could lay his hands on him, he bore him down with his sword. Mahān Singh felt very proud to know of his son's brave deed and so were all his soldiers.

In 1792, Mahān Singh fell ill while attacking the fort of Sodhrā, in the vicinity of Wazīrābād. He made over the command of his forces to his son, Ranjīt Singh, and retired from the battlefield to his home at Gujrānwālā. His illness grew worse, but the news of his son's victory had reached his ears before he died.

Once, while leading a force to Batālā to help his mother-in-law, Sadā Kaur of the Kanhaiyā Misl, against her enemies, Ranjīt Singh, who had succeeded his father in the leadership of the Sukkarchakkīās, halted at Lahore for two days. He saw the fort which was then held by Sikh *sardārs* of the Bhangī Misl and set his heart on it, for he knew that without Lahore, which had been the royal capital for centuries, his dream of uniting the Punjab under one single authority would not be realized.

Shāh Zamān, Ahmad Shāh Durrānī's grandson, became the king of Kabul after his father, Timūr. Following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, he led an expedition into the Punjab and, meeting with little resistance on the way, reached Lahore. Here he was trapped by Ranjīt Singh and other Sikh *sardārs* who laid siege to the city.

An interesting story is told of Ranjīt Singh's daring by a contemporary chronicler, Sohan Lāl Sūrī. One day he surprised the Afghan guards and reached the fort. Standing below the Samman Burj, the tower in which Shāh Zamān used to sit, he fired a few shots and called out aloud, "Behold, grandson of Ahmad Shāh. Here is the grandson of Sardār Charhat Singh come to meet you. Come, if you dare, and accept his challenge." As

there was no answer from inside the fort, Ranjīt Singh had to retire without a trial of strength with the Durrānī.

Shāh Zamān was reduced to such a predicament that he had to leave the fort and return to his country. He was pursued by the Sikhs up to the River Jhelum, constantly harassed by their plundering raids.

Shāh Zamān's general, Ahmad Khān Shahānchībāshī, was still in Lahore with 12,000 soldiers. Ranjīt Singh collected his forces at Rāmnagar where he was joined by other Sikh *sardārs* such as Sāhib Singh Bhangī and Nihāl Singh Attārīwālā. Ahmad Khān, forestalling Ranjīt Singh's plans, marched upon Rāmnagar, but was killed in action. The Bhangī chiefs reoccupied Lahore and Ranjīt Singh returned to Gujrānwālā.

Differences arose among the three *sardārs* who ruled over Lahore, and they often quarrelled among themselves. The neighbouring Muslim Nawāb of Kasūr, taking advantage of the situation, made preparations to attack the city. The citizens, who wanted neither the Bhangī *sardārs* nor the Nawāb, sent a message to Ranjīt Singh to come and take possession of Lahore. Among those who signed the letter were two Muslim notables, Mīān Āshiq Muhammad and Mīān Mohkam-ud-Dīn, and a Hindu, Hakīm Hākam Rāi.

Ranjīt Singh sent one of his trusted men, Qāzī Abdur Rahmān, to Lahore to watch the situation and himself proceeded to Batālā to take counsel with Māī Sadā Kaur. She fell in with Ranjīt Singh's plans and placed her troops at his disposal. Together, they set out for Lahore with 25,000 soldiers. Spending a night at Majīthā, near Amritsar, they reached Lahore the next day and camped outside the city in Wazīr Khān's Garden.

The defenders, instead of coming out to fight, shut themselves inside the city. Ranjīt Singh blew up a wall and rode in with two thousand horsemen and four guns. The Bhangī chiefs were surprised by Ranjīt Singh's quick manoeuvre. Two of them, Sāhib Singh and Mohar Singh, fled with their men, while Chet Singh remained to make his surrender. Ranjīt Singh treated him kindly and gave him a *jāgīr* for his maintenance.

Ranjīt Singh, who became master of Lahore on July 7, 1799, ordered his soldiers not to rob or molest the citizens. The city

had changed hands several times during the century, but never so peacefully. Ranjit Singh's rule brought relief and security to the people after years of disorder and trouble.

As Ranjīt Singh's power grew, many of the *sardārs* acknowledged his authority. Establishing his position in Lahore and the surrounding districts, he set out to conquer the more distant parts. One of his earliest adventures was towards Jammu whose ruler gave in without a fight. Nārowāl, Siālkot and Dilāwargarh were other places which fell to Ranjīt Singh during this campaign.

The Baisākhī day of 1801 was chosen to crown Ranjīt Singh Mahārājā of the Punjab. A royal *darbār* was held inside the Lahore Fort and prayers were held in mosques and temples for his long life. The investiture ceremony was performed by the revered Bābā Sāhib Singh Bedī (1756-1834), a descendant of Guru Nānak. Ranjīt Singh presented robes of honour to his *sardārs* and nobles and distributed charity among the poor.

Ranjīt Singh had won over the Kanhaiyās and the Nakaīs by matrimony and taken Lahore from the Bhangīs. He made friends with the Āhlūwālīās through their chief, Fateh Singh, who was invited by him to accompany him to the holy Sikh temple of Tarn Tāran. There they exchanged turbans in token of a pledge of lifelong friendship, and promised to help each other in time of need. Ranjīt Singh made offerings at the *gurdwārā* and had two sides of the sacred tank bricked. The other two sides had been built by Sardār Jassā Singh Rāmgarhīā.

Ranjīt Singh, accompanied by Fateh Singh, overran the north-west districts and annexed territories beyond the Jhelum. His next target was the important province of Multān. The governor, Nawāb Muzaffar Khān, surrendered without a fight and pledged loyalty to the Sikh ruler. The Nawāb of Jhang fought back, but was defeated. He was allowed to retain possession of his district.

In 1805, Ranjīt Singh visited Amritsar and held a military *darbār* at which he conferred ranks and honours on his nobles and generals. A chronicler, who was present on the occasion, recorded the names of those who were honoured. Desā Singh Majīthīā received command of four hundred horse and Harī Singh Nalwā of eight hundred horse and foot. Hukmā Singh Chimnī was made superintendent of light artillery, with

command of two hundred horse. Ghaus Khān, a Muslim officer, had charge of heavy artillery, with command of two thousand horse.

Ranjīt Singh had been a watchful observer of the progress of the British in India and their victories over the Marāthās and other Indian powers. He attributed their superiority to the exact discipline of their soldiers, and wanted to give his army the same kind of training. So great was his keenness to introduce among his own troops the British methods of drill and training that a story, apparently apocryphal, gained currency that he had once visited the East India Company's territory in disguise to watch the soldiers on parade.

By his wise policy and persistent care and by the example of his own courageous action, Ranjīt Singh made his army powerful and efficient. Foot service was looked down upon by Sikh soldiers, but he prevailed upon them to overcome this prejudice and succeeded in raising a strong infantry. He subsequently employed a number of foreigners, some of whom had served in Napoleon's army.

Towards the end of 1805, Ranjīt Singh was camping near Multān when he received a message from his son, Kharak Singh, that the Marāthā ruler, Jaswant Rāo Holkar, was coming to the Punjab in search of shelter, pursued by Lord Lake, the British commander-in-chief. Ranjīt Singh at once returned to Lahore where the agent of the Marāthā chief met him. Arrangements were made for Holkar's stay at Amritsar where he was kept in royal style. A congress of the Khālsā was held to decide what Ranjīt Singh might do to help Holkar. The Sikh ruler was counselled against engaging in an armed conflict with the British. He had been on the throne of Lahore for barely six years and was not sufficiently secure to cross swords with such a mighty power.

Ranjīt Singh met Holkar at Amritsar and wrote a letter to Lord Lake with a view to arranging a treaty of peace between the Marāthā chief and the British. He showed his guest extreme courtesy and attention throughout his stay in the Punjab and took him to the Harimandir and held military parades in his honour. As a result of Ranjīt Singh's intercession, a treaty was made between Holkar and the East India Company. The

Marāthā ruler secured the greater part of the territory which had been seized by the British.

Ranjīt Singh came to the Mālwā to settle a dispute between the Sikh rulers of Nābhā and Patiālā. Other cis-Sutlej chiefs had also taken sides in the conflict, Rājā Bhāg Singh of Jīnd joining hands with Nābhā and Sardār Mahtāb Singh of Thanesar and Bhāī Lāl Singh of Kaithal supporting Patiālā. As Ranjīt Singh crossed the Sutlej and approached the territories of Nābhā and Patiālā, both chiefs turned out to meet him. Their mutual quarrel was resolved in the gaieties that followed. On his way back to Lahore, Ranjīt Singh captured Ludhiānā and bestowed it on his uncle, Rājā Bhāg Singh. He gave Kot Bassīān, Talwandī and Jagrāon to the Rājā of Nābhā.

Early in 1807, Ranjīt Singh annexed Kasūr to the kingdom. Qutb-ud-Dīn, who had been appointed governor of the city, renounced allegiance to the Sikh court. The town was attacked and occupied after a fierce battle. Two of Ranjīt Singh's generals Harī Singh Nalwā and Dhannā Singh Malwaī, fought with conspicuous skill and gallantry. Qutb-ud-Dīn was caught while fleeing the fort, but Ranjīt Singh set him at liberty and made over to him as *jāgīr* Mamdot and a few other villages on the left bank of the Sutlej.

CHAPTER XI

THE ANGLO-SIKH TREATY AND THE CONQUEST OF PESHAWAR

Napoleon's victories in Europe had alarmed the British, who feared a French attack on the country through Afghanistan. In order to defeat any such designs, they decided to win the Sikhs over to their side and sent a young officer, C.T. Metcalfe, to Ranjīt Singh's court with an offer of friendship.

Metcalfe crossed the Sutlej and reached Khem Karan, near Kasūr, where the Sikh ruler was camping. The Mahārājā sent Fateh Singh Āhlūwālīā and Dīwān Mohkam Chand, with an escort of 2,000 cavalry, to receive him. Faqīr Azīz-ud-Dīn was appointed to look after the guest's comfort. The ceremonial did not fall in with the wishes of the British envoy, who, for the sake of the "rank and dignity of the Government" he represented, expected the embassy to be received by Ranjīt Singh himself, either in Lahore or in Amritsar.

Metcalfe met the Mahārājā in his camp on September 12, 1808, taking with him a large number of presents sent by the Governor-General of India. He told him how the English wished to have friendly relations with him and presented to him the draft of a treaty.

Ranjīt Singh did not credit the theory that the British had made the proposal to him because of the danger from Napoleon. He suspected that their real object was to put a seal on his southern boundary and draw a permanent line between his dominions and their own. He rejected Metcalfe's terms and made his own, seeking the British to recognize his authority over the Sikh country to the south of the Sutlej.

Metcalfe expressed his inability to make any changes in the draft of the treaty he had brought, but offered to forward Ranjīt Singh's proposals to the Governor-General. Ranjīt Singh suddenly struck camp and crossed the Sutlej. Metcalfe

followed him from place to place, without being able to secure another interview with him for any serious discussions. Ranjīt Singh overran the territory on the left bank of the river, thus shrewdly imposing on his English guest the role of a witness to his cis-Sutlej acquisitions.

Ranjīt Singh's bold and skilful policy would have borne fruit, had not the situation in Europe changed. As the danger of Napoleon's attack lessened, the British became arrogant in their attitude. On his return to Lahore, Ranjīt Singh received a message from the Governor-General that the British had taken the Sikh chiefs south of the Sutlej under their protection. The British sent a force under the command of Colonel David Ochterlony who, passing through Būrīā and Patiālā, came very close to the Sutlej and stationed himself at Ludhiānā. Ranjīt Singh also started making warlike preparations. Dīwān Mohkam Chand was asked to proceed with his troops and artillery from Kāngrā to Phillaur, on the Sutlej. The guns were mounted on the fort of Gobindgarh in Amritsar and powder and supplies laid in. The chiefs and nobles were asked to keep their soldiers in readiness. A large body of troops gathered in Lahore in a few days' time.

Meanwhile, Metcalfe, who had followed Ranjīt Singh to Lahore, presented a new treaty which was based on the terms first offered by the British and the proposals made by Ranjīt Singh. The treaty in this form was acceptable to the Sikh ruler. Although it stopped him from extending his influence beyond the Sutlej, he was left master of the territories, south of the river, which were in his possession before Metcalfe's visit. The treaty was signed at Amritsar on April 25, 1809. It provided that the British government would count the Lahore Darbār among the most honourable powers and would in no way interfere with the Sikh ruler's dominions to the north of the Sutlej. Both governments pledged friendship to each other. Ranjīt Singh appointed Bakhshī Nand Singh Bhandārī to stay at Ludhiānā as his agent with the English. The English sent Khushwaqt Rāi to Lahore as their representative at the Sikh court.

The treaty of Amritsar settled the southern limit of Ranjīt Singh's kingdom. With a friendly neighbour on that side, he was now free to extend his northern frontiers.

The Gurkhas had returned to the Kāngrā valley after Diwān Mohkam Chand's departure for Phillaur. Rājā Sansār Chand of Kāngrā sent his brother to Ranjīt Singh to request for help. Ranjīt Singh himself marched to the valley at the head of an army and guarded all approaches to it to cut off the invaders. The stranded Gurkhas made a stand near Ganesh Ghātī and fought with their usual valour and skill. But they could make little headway against Ranjīt Singh's tall and daring soldiers. The Gurkha leader, Amar Singh Thāpā, fled leaving the field to the Sikhs. Ranjīt Singh entered the fort and held a royal *darbār* which was attended by the hill chiefs of Chambā, Nūrpur, Kotlā, Shāhpur, Guler, Kahlūr, Mandī, Suket and Kulū. Desā Singh Majīthīā was appointed governor of Kāngrā.

Ranjīt Singh sent a force under the command of Hukmā Singh Chimnī to Jammu and himself marched on to Khushāb. The fort of Khushāb was held by Jaffār Khān, a Baluch chief. He gave up the city to Ranjīt Singh, but defended the fort stoutly. Ranjīt Singh invited him to vacate the fort and accept a *jāgīr*. The latter made a bold reply and said that he would lay down his life rather than give in. The siege was continued and the walls were dug up at the base and filled with powder. Realizing how desperate the situation was, the Baluch accepted Ranjīt Singh's demand for submission. He was given a *jāgīr* and allowed to remain in Khushāb with his family.

While at Khushāb, Ranjīt Singh learnt that Shāh Shujā-ul-Mulk, grandson of Ahmad Shāh Durrānī, who had been turned out of his country by his brother, Shāh Mahmūd, had crossed the Indus to seek shelter in the Punjab. Ranjīt Singh, who invited the Shāh to meet him, treated the exiled king with utmost courtesy and offered him the choice of any place in the Punjab for his residence. Shāh Shujā preferred to be in Rāwalpindī, where hospitality consistent with his station was provided by the Sikh ruler.

Ambition still stirred in Shāh Shujā's heart, and he made a bid to regain his lost kingdom. With the help of the Afghan governor of Kashmir, Atā Muhammad Khān, who was the son of his old minister, he took Peshawar and marched on to Kabul. He ousted Shāh Mahmūd and occupied the throne once again. But he was not destined to retain it. Four months later he was captured by the governor of Attock, Jahāndād Khān,

and sent to Kashmir. His wives and children were in Rāwalpindī with his brother, Shāh Zamān, himself an exile, who had been blinded and turned out of Kabul by Shāh Mahmūd.

Ranjīt Singh went to Rāwalpindī to meet Shāh Zamān with whom he had measured swords as a young man. The royal camp was put up outside the city. Ranjīt Singh received Shāh Zamān with honour and ceremony. He had taken with him his ministers, Diwān Bhiwānī Dās and his brother Diwān Devī Dās, who had been in the employ of Shāh Zamān at Kabul and were conversant with the manner and protocol of the Afghan court. They were entrusted with the duty of entertaining the old Shāh.

Ranjīt Singh felt great sympathy for Shāh Zamān and invited him to come and stay in Lahore. He settled upon him a monthly allowance of fifteen hundred rupees. Shāh Zamān shifted to Lahore where he was accorded a welcome befitting his rank. Shāh Shujā's wives and children also followed him to the Sikh capital to stay with him.

Shāh Shujā was kept in custody by the Afghan governor of Kashmir for more than a year. Meanwhile, his enemy Vizīr Fateh Khān, of Kabul, made plans to attack Kashmir and seize the royal prisoner. The family of Shāh Shujā was greatly concerned to hear of the designs of Fateh Khān who was a cruel man and had desperately sought his life. Shāh Shujā's wife, Wafā Begam, approached two of Ranjīt Singh's trusted courtiers, Diwān Mohkam Chand and Faqīr Azīz-ud-Dīn, and told them that she would present their master with the famous diamond, Koh-i-Nūr, if he rescued her husband from Kashmir. Ranjīt Singh, who had already set his heart on the valley, arranged an expedition, with Mohkam Chand in command. The other leading *sardārs* sent with him were Desā Singh Majīthiā, Nihāl Singh Attārīwālā and Jodh Singh Kalsīā.

Ranjīt Singh crossed the Jhelum and lay in camp near Rohtās while Fateh Khān came with his army from the other side. The former returned to Lahore, leaving the two armies to continue jointly their march to Kashmir. The Sikhs and Afghans crossed the Pīr Panjāl and entered the valley of Kashmir towards the close of 1812. Reaching his capital, Ranjīt Singh conveyed to Wafā Begam the assurance that he had asked his generals to secure release of her husband and bring him to Lahore.

The Afghans were better used to the hills and soon stole a march over the Lahore army. But the Sikhs reached the valley ahead of Fateh Khān, striking a shorter, though more hazardous, route. Atā Muhammad Khān was preparing to meet the invading armies near the fort of Shergarh. He fortified the place and blocked the paths and passes with stones and trees. Nature was on his side, too; it was snowing heavily and the cold was unbearable. Two hundred of Mohkam Chand's men succumbed to the rigours of the weather. The armies, however, kept up their advance and besieged the fort. Atā Muhammad was overcome and dislodged from his position.

As the victorious armies entered the fort, an Afghan servant informed Nihāl Singh Āttārīwālā where the doomed prisoner was detained. The *sardār* found him lying in shackles, in an underground dungeon. He was in a most rueful plight, his feet bleeding in the heavy chains and his clothes torn. The Sikhs broke his fetters and escorted him to Mohkam Chand's camp.

Fateh Khān was greatly upset when he discovered that his enemy had escaped his hands. He asked Mohkam Chand to make over to him the captive who had been tracked down after such a perilous adventure. Instead of giving up the luckless exile to his sworn enemy, Mohkam Chand brought him to Lahore where he was received with dignity by Ranjīt Singh.

After he had been in Lahore for some time, Shāh Shujā was reminded by Faqīr Azīz-ud-Dīn and Mohkam Chand of his Begam's promise to present their master with the Koh-i-Nūr. The Shāh was not quite willing to part with such a precious treasure and tried to put them off. He made excuses and said that the stone was in pawn with a banker at Kandahar for six crores of rupees. But Azīz-ud-Dīn and Mohkam Chand, who were mainly responsible for persuading Ranjīt Singh to undertake the difficult expedition to Kashmir and had a personal stake in the matter, persisted in their efforts. The Begam was at last obliged to abide by her word.

Shāh Shujā invited Ranjīt Singh to his house. A servant brought in a packet as they settled down in their seats after mutual exchange of courtesies. Ranjīt Singh watched eagerly as the stone was slowly unwrapped. He was beside himself with

joy when the Koh-i-Nūr, Mountain of Light, was placed on his palm.

The fort of Attock on the bank of the Indus has been India's gateway for invaders from the north-west. To capture this strategically important point, Ranjīt Singh despatched an army under Mohkam Chand, Harī Singh Nalwā and Desā Singh Majīthīā. His soldiers, who had gauged the Afghans' strength in the Kashmir campaign, did not think it beyond their capacity to wrest the stronghold from their possession.

Vizīr Fateh Khān of Kabul sent his brother, Dost Muhammad Khān, to defend the Afghan citadel. But before the latter could reach Attock, the fort had fallen to the Sikhs. The Kabul army assailed it from outside. In the conflict which lasted three months, Dost Muhammad Khān was wounded. His armies fled leaving the Sikhs masters of one of the strongest forts on the north-west frontier. This was one of Ranjīt Singh's most significant military successes. The boundary of his kingdom now extended right up to the River Attock. What is even more important, he had decisively defeated the Afghans who had ravaged India for centuries.

Early in 1817, Ranjīt Singh sent a body of troops to Multān under the command of Diwān Bhiwānī Dās to receive from Nawāb Muzaffar Khān the tribute he owed to the Sikh Darbār. The Nawāb evaded Ranjīt Singh's men. Bhiwānī Dās laid siege to the city, but showed little vigour in pressing it. He made a secret pact with the Nawāb which led Ranjīt Singh to recall him and deprive him of his office.

Ranjīt Singh planned the expedition afresh and sent a strong force in Prince Kharak Singh's charge. He arranged for supplies to be sent by boats down the Rāvī, the Chenāb and the Jhelum. One of his *rānīs*, Dātār Kaur, supervised the flow of supplies at Kot Kamālīā, midway between Lahore and Multān. The system of passing letters was organized in such a manner that the Mahārājā received in Lahore news from Multān by relays of messengers several times a day.

The fort of Multān was one of the strongest in the country and Nawāb Muzaffar Khān defended it with an equally strong heart. Kharak Singh's armies lay around it without making much headway. Ranjīt Singh, who did not consider the situation very hopeful, went to Amritsar to pray at the Harimandir for

the success of his campaign. He sent the big gun, Zamzamā, to Multān. Phūlā Singh, leader of the Akālī Sikhs, arrived with his band of reckless warriors. The Zamzamā was fired with effect and the gates of the fort were blown in. Akālī Phūlā Singh made a sudden rush and took the garrison by surprise. The grey-bearded Nawāb stood in his way, sword in hand, resolved to fight to the death. But he fell before the Akālī's resistless onslaught. Five of his sons also died fighting and a sixth one was severely wounded in the face. The two surviving sons were given *jāgīrs* by Ranjīt Singh. Their descendants are still in possession of those lands in Pakistan.

Prince Kharak Singh entered the city in state. A sum of thirty thousand rupees was set apart for the repair of the fort and Jodh Singh Kalsīā was left behind with 600 men to guard it. Ranjīt Singh sent officers from Lahore to settle the land revenue of the province. Those who took part in the campaign were rewarded generously. Misr Diwān Chand was given the title of Zafar Jang, Victor in War.

Ranjīt Singh's next expedition was towards Peshawar. He started from Lahore in the winter of 1818. Passing through Rohtās, Rāwalpindī and Hasan Abdāl, he reached Hazārā. A small batch was sent across the Attock to mark the position of the enemy. The Afghans ambushed the party in the hills of Khairābād and decimated it.

Ranjīt Singh made preparations to cross the Attock. He had brought with him skilful sailors to find out where the river could be easily forded. He himself rushed into the torrent and stood in the middle on the back of his elephant showing to his soldiers how to make light of danger. They followed his example and were soon on the other side of the river. Hearing of the victorious march of the Sikhs, Dost Muhammad Khān, the ruler of Peshawar, vacated the city and fled. Ranjīt Singh took possession of the Afghan stronghold without a fight. He appointed Jahāndād Khān as his governor and returned to Attock. Jahāndād Khān was subsequently replaced by Dost Muhammad Khān who submitted himself to the authority of the Lahore Darbār.

The Sikh conquest of Peshawar finally ended the long sequence of invasions from the north-west. Since Rājā Anang Pāl's defeat at the hands of Mahmūd of Ghaznī in the beginning

of the eleventh century, an unending procession of invaders had followed, looting and plundering the country at will. The Sikhs rolled back the wave forever and carried battle into the very home of the invaders.

In the beginning of 1819, Ranjīt Singh collected his choice cavalry and infantry troops at Wazīrābād and made an elaborate plan to attack Kashmir which was still under Afghan control. His general, Misr Diwān Chand, took Rajaurī and Poonch and descended into the valley, over the mountain passes, with a number of light guns dragged along by his men. Jabbār Khān, the ruler of Kashmir, took the field against him near Supin and fought heroically. He gained an initial advantage over Misr Diwān Chand and captured two of his guns. But a second attack from the Sikh army completely overwhelmed him and he fled across the mountains. There was no further opposition to the Sikhs and Prince Kharak Singh entered the city of Srinagar on July 4, 1819.

Ranjīt Singh was very happy at the victory and went to Amritsar to make a thanks-giving prayer at the Harimandir. Large sums of money were given away to the poor. The cities of Lahore and Amritsar were illuminated for three days.

Diwān Motī Dās was appointed governor of Kashmir, with Shām Singh Attārīwālā, Jawālā Singh Padhānīā and Misr Diwān Chand to assist him restore order in the valley. Faqīr Azīz-ud-Dīn was sent from Lahore to make a report on the climate of Kashmir and Diwān Devī Dās was charged with organizing the revenue system. Ranjīt Singh took keen interest in the progress of the province and encouraged trade and the shawl-making industry.

Ten successive governors administered Kashmir during the Sikh regime. One of them was Prince Sher Singh, the second son of Ranjīt Singh, who carried the Sikh standard across the high mountains into Ladakh. The conquest of the Ladakh valley, which was strategically very important, made the frontier secure against the expanding influence of China. It was during Sher Singh's rule as Mahārājā of the Punjab that a Sikh expedition under Zorāwar Singh, marched towards Tibet. Garo and Rudok were occupied and the Lhasa armies attacked. But owing to a premature snowfall and difficult and unfamiliar

terrain, the campaign had to be halted, though not without securing the Khālsā kingdom recognition by treaty.[1]

Ranjīt Singh sent two thousand horsemen under the command of Sher Singh to recapture Peshawar. Sher Singh was followed at short intervals by Harī Singh Nalwā and Ranjīt Singh himself. The Mahārājā was accompanied by Akālī Phūlā Singh, Desā Singh Majīthīā and Fateh Singh Āhlūwālīā.

Prince Sher Singh and Harī Singh Nalwā had crossed the Attock by means of a boat-bridge before the arrival of Ranjīt Singh. They captured the fort of Jahāngīrā on the other side of the river, beating off the Afghans. This sudden success of Sher Singh surprised Āzim Khān who was still at Peshawar. He sent his brother, Dost Muhammad Khān, who engaged Sher Singh's troops near the fort of Jahāngīrā and had the Attock bridge destroyed to prevent any help reaching the Sikhs.

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[1]An English version of the Treaty, between the Khālsā Darbār on the one hand and the Emperor of China and the Lama Guru of Lhasa on the other is given below:

As on this auspicious day, the 2nd of Assūj, Samvat 1899 (16th/17th September 1842) we, the officers of the Lhasa (Government), Kalon of Sokan and Bakshi Shajpuh, Commander of the Forces, and two officers on behalf of the most resplendent Srī Khālsājī Sāhib, the asylum of the world, King Sher Singhjī, and Srī Mahārājā Sāhib Rājā-i-Rājagān Rājā Sāhib Bahādur Rājā Gulāb Singh, i.e. the Muktār-ud-Daulā Diwān Harī Chand and the asylum of vizīrs, Vizīr Ratnūn, in a meeting called together for the promotion of peace and unity, and by professions and vows of friendship, unity and sincerity of heart and by taking oaths like those of Kunjak Sāhib, have arranged and agreed that relations of peace, friendship and unity between Srī Khālsājī and Srī Mahārājā Sāhib Bahādur Rājā Gulāb Singhjī, and the Emperor of China and the Lama Guru of Lhasa will henceforward remain firmly established forever; and we declare in the presence of the Kunjak Sāhib that on no account whatsoever will there be any deviation, difference or departure (from this agreement). We shall neither at present nor in future have anything to do or interfere at all with the boundaries of Ladakh and its surroundings as fixed from ancient times and will allow the annual export of wool, shawls and tea by way of Ladakh according to the old established custom.

Should any of the opponents of Srī Sarkār Khālsājī and Srī Rājā Sāhib Bahādur at any time enter our territories, we shall not pay any heed to his words or allow him to remain in our country.

We shall offer no hindrance to traders of Ladakh who visit our territories. We shall not even to the extent of a hair's breadth act in contravention of the terms that we have agreed to above regarding firm friendship, unity, the fixed boundaries of Ladakh and the keeping open of the route for wool, shawls and tea. We call Kunjak Sāhib, Kairi, Lassi, Zhoh Mahan, and Khushal Choh as witnesses to this treaty.

Ranjīt Singh encamped on the left bank of the river and started building a new bridge. But an informer brought the news that Sher Singh's force was completely at the mercy of the enemy and needed immediate relief. Such was this River Attock, remarked one of the *sardārs*, that it made everyone stop and wait for it. "No," said Ranjīt Singh, "the Attock (*atak*, in Punjabi, means obstacle) offers obstacle only to those who lack the will to go forward. It stops not those whose hearts are free from hesitation." Saying these words, he threw his horse into the water. The river was in spate, but the animal swam across the swollen stream and bore its intrepid rider steadily along.

The legend in the Punjab and the neighbouring frontier is still current that the River Attock made way for Ranjīt Singh.

Hearing of Ranjīt Singh's arrival, the Afghans lost heart and sought safety in flight. They joined the main body of their army at Nowsherā and prepared for a final contest. Ranjīt Singh strengthened the forts of Jahāngīrā and Khairābād and sent his men secretly to Peshawar and Nowsherā to gauge the strength of the enemy.

Ranjīt Singh was now ready with his plans for the offensive. Akālī Phūlā Singh, with eight hundred horse and seven hundred foot, was to attack from one direction, and Desā Singh Majīthīā and Fateh Singh Āhlūwālīā with one thousand horse and three foot battalions from the other. Prince Kharak Singh, Harī Singh Nalwā, General Ventura and General Allard were to keep Āzim Khān from joining the Afghans from across the River Landā. Ranjīt Singh kept with himself the reserves to rush aid where needed.

Both armies grappled with each other furiously. Akālī Phūlā Singh made a desperate charge and soon found himself in the thick of the battle. Suddenly his horse was struck by a bullet and died. Akālī Phūlā Singh was also hurt, but he shifted to an elephant and pressed forward. The Durrānīs made him their chief target and poured incessant fire on him. A well-directed shower of bullets tore through his body and the brave hero of many a battle fell to the ground dead.

This only spurred Ranjīt Singh to fiercer action. He sent his Gurkha battalion under the command of Bal Bahādur to attack the Afghans from behind the hills. He himself fell on

the enemy with all his might and made havoc of their ranks. The Afghans could no longer resist the attack. Their hopes of getting relief from Āzim Khān were defeated by Prince Kharak Singh who stoutly barred his way. Pressed hard, the Afghans broke up and fled into the hills. Peshawar fell into Ranjīt Singh's hands once again. The people came out in their thousands to welcome him. A few days later Yār Muhammad Khān and Dost Muhammad Khān presented themselves at Peshawar. They made their submission to the Sikh ruler, who appointed the former governor of the city.

CHAPTER XII

FOREIGNERS AT THE SIKH COURT

Two Europeans, Ventura, an Italian by birth, and Allard, a Frenchman, came to Lahore in 1822 to seek service in the Sikh army. Both of them had served under Napoleon in the imperial army of France. After Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo in 1815, they lost their occupation and left Europe to try their fortune in the East. They had heard many a tale of the grandeur of Ranjīt Singh's court and were much taken up with the idea of visiting Lahore.

Travelling through Afghanistan, they reached Peshawar dressed as Persian traders and stayed in a mosque. Ventura had to sell his rosary studded with precious stones to a Jewish trader with a view to obtaining money for their journey to the Sikh metropolis.

As soon as Ranjīt Singh learnt of the arrival of two foreigners in his capital, he ordered them to be presented to him. He received them kindly and asked them questions about their health, journeys, previous employment and future plans. He showed them his troops on parade and provided amenities for their entertainment. But about their request for employment he would say nothing until he had satisfied himself in respect of their antecedents and the real object of their visit to Lahore.

The visitors were anxious for a definite assurance from the Mahārājā and, after waiting for some time, addressed to him the following letter seeking his orders on their request :

1st April, 1822

TO HIS MAJESTY THE KING OF LAHORE

SIRE,

The favours showered on us by Your Majesty since our arrival

at this capital are innumerable, and correspond to the high idea we have formed of Your Benevolence. Everything about Your Majesty is great, and worthy of a Sovereign who aspires to immortality. Sire, when we first had the honour of being presented to Your Majesty we disclosed to You the motive of our journey. The reply vouchsafed to us sets us at ease, but leaves us uncertain of our future.

. . . We have therefore at the advice of Faqīr Nūr-ud-Dīn renewed our request in the French language, which we have been given to understand is familiar to one of your court. . . .We again supplicate Your Majesty to be good enough to give definite order which we shall always follow with the utmost respect and obedience.

We have the honour to be, with the deepest respect, the very humble, very obedient, and very devoted servants of Your Majesty.

CH. VENTURA CH. ALLARD

How Ranjīt Singh kept the two occupied for several days is recorded in the diaries of the Sikh Darbār. Here are quoted two typical entries:

Lahore Akhbār, 17th and 18th May 1822. A long conversation upon commonplace topics took place between the French Officers, Messrs Allar and Wuntoora. The Mahārājā informed them that Mr Ross had treated his vakīl [carrying the letter] with great kindness. The Mahārājā begged the French Officers to be of good cheer, and he would soon find employment for them, and 500 horsemen were ordered from the camp of Dewān Misur Chand, to be placed with Messrs Allar and Wuntoora for the purpose of teaching them the European exercises.

Lahore Akhbār, 21st and 23rd May 1822. The Mahārājā informed the French Officers that the battalion of Shaikh Basāvan composed of Sikhs and Pūrbīās, with muskets and flints, should be placed under their charge for instruction, and the Shaikh should be ordered to obey the European officers. The Mahārājā sent Mr Allar to inspect the horse artillery, and Mr Wuntoora to inspect the battalion of Shaikh Basāvan. The battalion guns and two companies of Pūrbīās formed into a square and fired for two *ghurrees* [forty-eight minutes] and the Mahārājā viewed them on horseback, galloping from flank to flank.

To make sure that they were not Englishmen come to Lahore as spies, the Mahārājā had desired the foreigners to write out

their applications in French. The petitions as drafted by them were sent to Ludhiānā to be translated for him by his agent there. He also had a letter written to Ventura and Allard in English by one of his courtiers. It was sent to them by a special messenger who pretended that he had brought the letter from William Moorcroft, the English traveller, then in Kashmir. Neither Ventura nor Allard knew Moorcroft. They showed utter surprise, and returned the letter to the messenger.

On obtaining this satisfaction, Ranjīt Singh gave them employment. They were to instruct his troops in the European methods of drill. Ventura was placed in command of Fauj-i-Khās, and Allard was asked to raise a cavalry corps.

Before taking up their duties, Ventura and Allard had to sign an agreement that in the event of a clash between the Mahārājā and a European power, they would remain loyal to their master and fight for him. They were to wear their beards long and abstain from cow's flesh and tobacco. Thus all foreigners who entered the Sikh service contracted "to domesticate themselves in the country by marriage, not to eat beef, nor smoke tobacco in public, to permit their beards to grow, to take care not to offend against the Sikh religion, and if reqruied, to fight against their own country."

Ranjīt Singh provided houses for Ventura and Allard and gave them handsome salaries. He bestowed on them generous gifts from time to time. To Ventura he made a present of forty thousand rupees at the time of his wedding which took place in Ludhiānā. Two villages were subsequently given in *jāgīr* to his little daughter, Victorine. Besides his own regular *jāgīr*, Ventura also received land and a sum of thirty-five thousand rupees to build himself a house after his own heart. On this site, near Anārkalī, he constructed a beautiful *chateau* in the French style. In British days, the building accommodated part of the Punjab government secretariat.

Allard, like Ventura, enjoyed his master's confidence and received from him ample bounty. But two unfortunate events overshadowed his Indian career. One was the death of his daughter by his Indian wife, Bannou Pān Deī of Chambā, and the other the failure of a Calcutta bank in which he lost eight lakhs of rupees. He was very fond of his daughter and buried

her in the garden of the house he had built in Lahore. The place came to be known as Kurī Bāgh in memory of his daughter, Marie Charlotte. The house and the garden were later purchased by the Mahārājā of Kapūrthalā and were his property until the partition of the Punjab in 1947.

Once Allard, returning to Lahore after a spell of leave in France, brought Ranjīt Singh a message of goodwill and presents from Louis Philippe. Among the gifts was a picture of the French King. The letter, couched in gracious French, expressed sentiments of deep regard for the King of the Punjab. To quote a portion:

> Although long distances and oceans part the kingdom of the Punjab from that of France, this is no bar to the love that binds our hearts together. As the sun confers light on the distant parts of the world, the true love unites hearts, physically separated, in a common rhythm of friendship and harmony.

Louis Philippe also named Allard his ambassador to the Sikh kingdom.

Another European at the court of Ranjīt Singh was Dr Honigberger, a native of Hungary. He was a personal physician to Mahārājā Ranjīt Singh, and used the homoeopathic method of medical treatment in India for the first time.

Honigberger combined with his medical knowledge an ardent spirit of enquiry and adventure that took him away from his home while still young. He had a great fascination for the East, which, he regarded as "the cradle of mankind and the birthplace of religion and science." He left his native town—Kronstadt—for Constantinople when he was twenty. He travelled widely in the Middle Eastern countries, practising the healing art and enlarging his knowledge by his researches and experience. He stayed in Palestine and in Syria where he introduced vaccination. He was in Baghdad, when, hearing of Ranjīt Singh's generosity and of the welcome the Europeans met with at his court, he made up his mind to visit Lahore.

He started in the winter of 1829 and, passing through Basra and Muscat, arrived at Karachi. For his journey in India, he disguised himself as an Arab. He spoke Arabic, stayed in mosques, and ate his food using his fingers instead of a knife and

fork. Europeans were then not known in Sind, although the British dominions were not far off.

The journey from Multān to Lahore was made on horseback. It took him four months in all from Baghdad to Lahore, two by sea and two by land.

Ranjīt Singh was out on a military expedition when Honigberger arrived at Lahore, and did not return until the rainy season. Honigberger took advantage of this interval making contacts and establishing his reputation as a physician. The first patient he attended was Achilles, adopted son of General Allard, who had long been suffering from a fistula on his spine. Honigberger made a successful operation and cured the boy. He also cured several patients of hydrophobia.

One of Honigberger's early regrets was the death of Ranjīt Singh's favourite riding horse while under treatment by him. The horse was one of the five presented to the Mahārājā by the King of England.

During this period Honigberger availed himself of an opportunity to visit Kashmir at the invitation of Suchet Singh Dogrā, brother of Dhiān Singh, then a minister at Lahore, and Gulāb Singh, founder of the ruling family of Kashmir.

Ranjīt Singh made Honigberger welcome when he met him at Lahore and at once gave him employment as physician to the court. His salary was fixed at Rs 800 a month and later raised to Rs 3,000. Ranjīt Singh came to trust him so much that one day he offered him the choice of a governorship of a province or command of the artillery department. Honigberger was so much the man of his profession that he declined the honour, but, on the Mahārājā's insistence, he had to accept management of the gunpowder and gunstock manufactory.

Honigberger left Lahore for his native land after a stay of four years. Travelling overland he passed through Multān, Derā Ghāzī Khān, Kabul, Bokhara and Russian towns such as Novograd and St Petersburg. He at last reached Kronstadt from where he took a trip to Paris. There he met Hahnemann, the father of homoeopathy. Honigberger was deeply interested in the new system and obtained some medicines for experiments.

Home could not hold Honigberger for long and he set out once again on his journey to the East. He stopped at

Constantinople for a while and then returned to Lahore. Here his old offices were restored to him. He married a Kashmiri woman by whom he had two daughters who were sent to school at Mussoorie.

Many more foreigners came and found employment at the court of Ranjīt Singh. Among them were Avitabile, an Italian, who was appointed governor of Peshawar, General Court, a Frenchman, who organized the artillery, and Dr Harlan, an American, who became governor of Jasrotā, and later of Gujrāt. Henry Steinbach, a German, was a battalion commander, Hurbon, a Spaniard, was an engineer, Dr Benet, a Frenchman, was surgeon-general to the Khālsā army, and Vieskenawitch, a Russian, held a rank in the infantry. There were a number of Englismen too—Fitzroy, Gillmore, Leslie, Harvey and Foulkes, to mention but a few—who were employed on various civil and military duties. With men of such diverse races, nationalities and faiths to serve him, Ranjīt Singh maintained a most picturesque and cosmopolitan court.

He was very kind to these foreigners. He trusted them and gave them positions of responsibility and rewarded them generously for their services. But he always kept a watchful eye on them and never let them have an influence over him. They willingly submitted to his natural dignity and served him faithfully.

Ranjīt Singh's Lahore also attracted many visitors and travellers. Like his foreign courtiers, they came from all parts of the world. Not a few of them were drawn by reports of the Mahārājā's hospitality and his personal charm and *joi de vivre*. Ranjīt Singh received his guests with easy grace and made them feel at home in his presence. He was always courteous and considerate towards them and studiously looked after their comfort. The slightest detail was supervised by him and nothing was ever overlooked. He dispensed lavish entertainment and the standard of his hospitality was nowhere surpassed. What fascinated his visitors most was his unquenchable curiosity. He asked them the most searching questions and his keenness of mind and range of interest surprised everyone. Many travellers have written in their books of his generosity, refined manner and mental alertness. He was always cheerful and vivacious and transmitted the same spirit of heartiness to his audience.

In the summer of 1821, William Moorcroft, the Superintendent of the East India Company's studs in India, came to visit Ranjīt Singh's court. He was going to Bokhara to purchase horses and stopped at Lahore on the way. Ranjīt Singh received him with much civility and attention. A daily allowance of one hundred rupees was fixed for his entertainment, and he was put up in the Bārādarī in Shālāmār Gardens as a royal guest.

Ranjīt Singh received Moorcroft in audience several times during his stay in Lahore and took him out for a review of his troops. Moorcroft was greatly impressed by the turnout and discipline of the Sikh army. He also visited the royal stables and remarked that some of Ranjīt Singh's horses were the finest in the world.

Moorcroft had brought Ranjīt Singh a letter from Prince Nesselrode of Russia which contained greetings and good wishes from the ruler of that country. It also expressed Russia's desire to have trade relations with the country of Ranjīt Singh. The traders from the Punjab were assured welcome and security in Russia.

With Ranjīt Singh's permission, Moorcroft left for Ladakh on his way to Bokhara. He made good his route across the northern mountains into Kashmir, but unfortunately met his death by fever in an attempt to pass a tract of unhealthy country.

Another famous traveller to visit Ranjīt Singh was Baron Charles Hugel. He was a German scientist, who travelled extensively in the Punjab and Kashmir. In his book he wrote that the Punjab under Ranjīt Singh was safer than territories ruled by the British. He also recorded his conversations with Ranjīt Singh, who, as usual, asked him many questions. He asked him if he had served as a soldier and questioned him about the German armies and their wars with France. He asked him what he thought of the Sikh army and whether it was in a fit state to confront a European force.

"You have seen the whole world. Which country do you like best?" asked Ranjīt Singh.

"My own native land."

"You have seen Kashmir. What did you think of it?"

"Sickness and famine have of late years so depopulated it that it must produce a revenue of small amount."

"I have," said the Mahārājā, "asked my governor to give money to the poor. Think you that he robs me?"

"Who writes your letters? . . . What is your pay? . . . What is the pay of an Austrian Colonel? . . . Have you seen Lord William Bentinck? . . . Do you wish to see my troops exercise? . . . Are the troops of your Emperor exercised in this manner?"

For a whole hour, Hugel was subjected to a gruelling examination without a moment's intermission. While answering this incessant shower of questions, he felt the Mahārājā's single eye piercing into his innermost thoughts.

At the end of the interview, the Mahārājā accompanied the guest to the door, whereafter his trusted minister, Faqīr Azīz-ud-Dīn, took charge. Suddenly it started raining. "When princes meet in the garden of friendship, the water-bearers of heaven moisten the flowers that they may give out all their perfume," said the Faqīr Sāhib, in his characteristically rococo Persian.

Victor Jacquemont, a French traveller, also praised Ranjīt Singh's powers of conversation and his shrewd judgement. He wrote in his book: "Ranjīt Singh is almost the first inquisitive Indian I have seen, but his curiosity makes up for the apathy of his whole nation. He asked me a hundred thousand questions about India, the English, Europe, Bonaparte, this world in general and the other one, hell and paradise, the soul, God, the devil, and a thousand things besides."

Once an English missionary, the Rev Dr Joseph Wolff, travelling overland through the Middle East, crossed the Indus into Sikh territory. So efficient was Ranjīt Singh's system of intelligence that every movement of the vicar was reported to him. He was particularly amused to learn that the latter had screamed violently while crossing the river. Dr Wolff was received this side of the river by officers of high rank from the Sikh court. Twenty-one guns were fired in his honour. A daily *ziāfat* of Rs 250, twenty pots of sweetmeat and linen to make twenty shirts was provided for him. In a letter addressed to Ranjīt Singh thanking him for the generous reception, Dr Wolff said that "the only object of his journey was to proclaim to the nation that there is only one name given under heaven, by which man can be saved, and that is the name of Jesus Christ."

At Rāwalpindī, Wolff put up in the camp of Kharak Singh, heir apparent to the throne of the Punjab. He was brought to

the palace of the governor as he arrived at Gujrāt late at night. To his great surprise, he heard some one singing Yankee Doodle, with all the American snuffle. He discovered that it was the Mahārājā's governor himself—Dr Josiah Harlan, who was a citizen of the United States of America and had come from Philadelphia, in the State of Pennsylvania. Wolff continued to receive his daily *ziāfat* and proceeded towards Amritsar. Reaching Wazīrābād, he took up his abode with General Avitabile, who was the governor of the town. In Lahore, Wolff resided in the house of General Allard. Here he issued proclamations, which were posted in the streets calling on the nations to turn to the Chirst. For this he received a polite letter of disapprobation from Ranjīt Singh in which he said that he had read his proclamations and added that "such words must neither be said nor heard."

Through continual reports, Ranjīt Singh had been following the travels of the English padre. When he received him in audience in Amritsar, he told him that he had been preaching that people should put their trust in the Creator and be afraid of none. "Then, why were you so afraid when you crossed the Indus over the suspension-bridge on an elephant?" questioned the Mahārājā. An interlude of sparkling colloquy followed in which Ranjīt Singh's native power of raillery showed to great advantage. He asked the visitor why he was not preaching to the English in Hindustān "who have no religion at all." He told Dr Wolff that one way of coming near God was by making an alliance with the British government. This, he added, he had ensured by a meeting at Ropar with the Lārd Nawāb Sāhib [the Governor-General, Lord William Bentinck].

Dr Murray, a surgeon in the British army, was sent in 1826 by the Governor-General to attend upon Ranjīt Singh who had been taken ill. Ranjīt Singh saw him several times during his stay in Lahore. He asked his advice about his health, but trusted more to time and abstinence than to his medicine. The Governor-General, Lord Amherst, was then travelling upcountry from Calcutta. Ranjīt Singh asked Murray about the object of the Governor-General's journey and, every time he met him, he began by asking him how the Governor-General was and how far he had come. He asked him questions about the Burmese war, the qualities of the Burmese soldiers

and the amount of money obtained by the English at the end of the war. Another event in British India that had aroused his interest was the mutiny at Barrackpore. He asked Murray minutely about its causes and effects and whether Indian troops had been employed in suppressing it. He also showed him his horses, describing their names and qualities as they passed before them. Murray was sometimes invited to attend military parades and reviews and was greatly impressed by the fine bearing and steadiness of the Sikh troops.

On November 5, 1834, arrived at Ludhiānā, on the Anglo-Sikh frontier, the Rev John C. Lowrie, the first American missionary to travel to India. His object was to establish a Christian mission on behalf of the Western Foreign Missionary Society, Philadelphia, afterwards merged with the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church of the United States.

Mahārājā Ranjīt Singh, always well informed about the developments in the territories of the East India Company as in his own, learnt through his Vakīl or *charge d'affaires* of Lowrie's arrival in Ludhiānā and immediately sent an invitation to him to visit Lahore. Besides the pleasure and fun he derived from meeting the *ferrangīs*, the Mahārājā had a special purpose in inviting Lowrie. He wished to have an English school established in his capital.

Lowrie set out on January 28, 1835, on an elephant Ranjīt Singh kept in Ludhiānā; another elephant had been sent from Lahore to carry the tents. There were ten horsemen assigned to his guard, besides the Persian *munshī* or interpreter-secretary who had been educated at the English College at Delhi, and a large suite of servants. The Sutlej was crossed at Phillaur on the opposite bank, then a strong Sikh fortress. Lowrie made halts in towns such as Phagwārā, Jullundur, Kapūrthalā and Jandiālā. Being the guest of the Mahārājā, he was given royal reception and hospitality everywhere. He was presented *nazars*, the villagers offering silver rupees on folded corners of their mantles which he was required to touch. He was especially struck to see how freely and happily Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus mixed together everywhere and to see "the mosques and temples of these sects . . . standing in the same streets," Many were the

discoveries, joys and embarrassments of this journey. His greatest embarrassment was when nautch girls turned out to perform at his tent at Phagwārā.

Phagwārā was described as containing "probably fifteen thousand inhabitants. The houses and public buildings make a better appearance than is usual in cities of India, a larger portion of them being of brick than is common. The people are chiefly Hindus; the Mussulmans have two mosques; and there are two or three hundred Sikhs. . . . There are a few Persian and Sanskrit schools at this town. . . . The chief trade of the people is in the common white sugar of the country."

At Kapūrthalā, Lowrie was received by Fateh Singh, the chief of the territory. He was so impressed by his openness that he thought "a branch of our mission might be established here under promising prospects." The wish came out to be prophetically true when twenty-five years later a Christian mission was established in Kapūrthalā on the invitation of Fateh Singh's grandson, Rājā Randhīr Singh.

On February 4, 1835, Lowrie reached Amritsar where he was deeply impressed to see the gilt temple and its environs. To quote from his book, *Travels in North India*: ". . . Amritsar is the Sikh Athens and Jerusalem, being the chief city of learning and religion. The cause of its celebrity is undoubtedly the Sacred Reservoir. . . . It is the chief place of resort of Sikh pilgrims, and has many daily devotees, who think their worship becomes highly meritorious by being performed at so sacred a place. Rajahs have vied with each other in the richness of their offerings for its decoration; and the number of learned Sikhs, who live in cloisters around its pavement, and in the booths on the margin of its waters, to explain the sacred book, the Granth, is so large as to diffuse almost a literary atmosphere over the place of devotion."

Lahnā Singh Majīthīā, the local *sardār*, called on him in the evening. Taking the cue from the thermometer and the compass lying on the guest's table, he started up a scientific conversation ranging from the use of certain instruments and the methods of taking the longitude and latitude of a place to magnetism and astronomy. The discussion on religious topics was thus prevented and, when Lowrie proposed to present his host with

a copy of the New Testament in Gurmukhī, he was told that he already possessed one.

Two days later Lowrie reached Lahore. He was put up in the *chateau* built by the Mahārājā's French general, Court, as his summer residence in an extensive garden of orange plants. In the afternoon, presents were laid out on behalf of the Mahārājā. In the polite conversation that ensued, references were made to the friendship which existed between the British and the Sikhs (no distinction was then made between the English and the Americans and, although Lowrie was an American, he was received as an English padre). Faqīr Nūr-ud-Dīn, brother of Ranjīt Singh's prime minister, led this mission and he very carefully introduced the subject of the English school. Lowrie was asked how he would be able to teach English to Punjabi boys when he understood so little of the local language, how he would act if different pupils wished to learn different branches and who should decide what was to be taught at the school. One direct question was: "If the government established a school, who would decide on the branches to be taught ?"

The next day, Faqīr Azīz-ud-Dīn himself came with presents from the Mahārājā. His conversation was marked "with good sense, less display and a more direct coming to the point than that of his brother." But he was as profuse in his compliments. On taking leave from Lowrie, Faqīr Nūr-ud-Dīn had the previous day said: "The bud of my heart which was shut up has been opened by the wind of your conversation into a fine flower." His brother, Faqīr Azīz-ud-Dīn, expressed himself in an equally lavish manner: "You are like a treasure of precious jewels of which I could not obtain full advantage" owing to his lack of knowledge of the English language.

On February 8, Lowrie was received in audience by Ranjīt Singh. Endowed richly with mother wit and always full of questions, Ranjīt Singh opened the customary inquisition as soon as Lowrie arrived. He enquired about Lowrie's learning, and if it included military and medical branches. He asked him if he knew anything about horses and he asked him questions about his health, whether he was married, why he wore crepe on his hat, and the like.

In the afternoon, Faqīr Azīz-ud-Dīn made a second visit to the guest. This time he was accompanied by two boys, sons of

one of the courtiers, who wished to study English. Seeing some books lying on the table, Faqīr Azīz-ud-Dīn asked Lowrie to read out to him portions from the Greek Testament. He obliged by turning to the latter part of the third chapter of John's Gospel, but was disappointed that, though the Faqīr was very polite, he forbore to say *drust, khūb* (correct, excellent), being a Muslim. At their next meeting, the Faqīr read out a series of quotations from the Quran in Arabic on the subject of religion. Both of them agreed that "prayers should not be made to be seen of men and that they should be from the heart." The Faqīr told him that he was a Sufi Musalman.

Invitations were sent to Lowrie to be present at public entertainments and to join the Mahārājā on a hunting expedition, but he felt reluctant. At their next meeting the Mahārājā, with a Punjabi's sense of persiflage, riled him over the matter of the nautch girls. He said, "If you have not seen the nautch girls of Lahore, whatever have you seen?"

Lowrie was at last persuaded to join the Mahārājā on a hunting tour across the Rāvī. Faqīr Nūr-ud-Dīn came to conduct him out of town. On the way, they had long conversations on matters religious and other. As the party reached Ranjīt Singh's camp, they learnt that a tiger had been killed the previous day. In the afternoon, Lowrie went out with the Mahārājā. It was a large party consisting of hundreds of men, some on elephants, some on camels and many on horses. There were still more on foot. Some carried guns, others swords and still others spears and shields. Some led dogs and some carried falcons. They took a circuit of several miles but started nothing. Lowrie was not sorry. Even on this expedition, the Mahārājā found time to put him some more questions. He asked him if he had read the books of other faiths and if the Christian religion differed from others chiefly in teaching that all men were sinners. Mixed with the highlands of theology were the Mahārājā's plain questions about dancing girls. The Mahārājā especially remembered Lowrie's remark that, if the Guru Granth were a printed book, it would not cost more than twenty rupees, and, on his return to Lahore, he quoted it to his court. Handwritten copies of the Guru Granth cost Rs 100 to Rs 200 each in those days.

The same year Gurmukhī printing was started by the Ludhiānā Mission on a wooden press which Lowrie's colleague,

Newton, had brought from Calcutta. Besides translations of portions of the Bible, the Mission produced the first dictionary of the Punjabi language and the first grammar. Printing remained unknown on the other side of the Sutlej until much later.

The negotiations with Lowrie broke down on the question of the teaching of the Bible in the proposed school. His condition on this point was not acceptable to Ranjīt Singh. Nevertheless, Lowrie was given a friendly dismissal on March 5, 1835, and invested with a *khill'at*. Among the presents given him was a horse which Lowrie sold on his return to Ludhiānā for Rs 574, crediting the amount to the funds of the Mission. The Mahārājā was, as usual, in high good humour. He was surprised to hear from Lowrie that the presents he had received would be made over to the Missionary Society. At the time of parting, Ranjīt Singh had again many questions to ask him: Was his Missionary Society a government company that he had to transfer his presents to it? How are the funds raised for the Society? What connections did padres have with the government of their country? If a padre commits a crime, will the government punish him like any other man?

In spite of his fondness for lengthy discourses with his guests, Ranjīt Singh was not unconscious of the virtues of restraint. He would not breathe one syllable beyond what he really intended to say. During his long conversations with Dr Murray, for instance, he did not so much as mention an incident of insubordination which had occurred in a Sikh army camp near Lahore during his visit. Murray, as he records in his book, learnt about it from his servants, and was surprised at his royal host's reserve in matters of state.

CHAPTER XIII

PAGEANTRY

Lord William Bentinck's meeting with Mahārājā Ranjīt Singh at Ropar, on the bank of the Sutlej, was a most spectacular occasion in the history of Anglo-Indian relations. Song and legend in the countryside still enshrine its memory and attempt to recapture that atmosphere of colour and pageantry.

The display on both sides submerged, for a while, the political significance, and an exhibition of regal pomp seemed the only purpose. The lavishness of the proceedings was, however, relieved by warm and spontaneous friendliness shown by the two potentates towards each other. This human aspect is no less important than the political and spectacular.

Since the Amritsar Treaty of 1809, relations between the English and Ranjīt Singh had been cordial. Regular exchange of embassies and presents was a common feature. When, in 1827, Lord Amherst came to Simla for the first time, Ranjīt Singh sent a complimentary mission to bid him welcome. The mission consisted of Faqīr Azīz-ud-Dīn and Dīwān Motī Rām, who took with them a canopy made of Kashmir *pashmīnā*, an elephant, five horses and a large number of other presents for the Governor-General. Amherst sent a return mission to the court of Ranjīt Singh with presents of two English horses, an elephant, two pearl necklaces, a double-barrelled rifle and a few pieces of brocade.

King William IV of England also sent Ranjīt Singh a friendly letter and presents. The letter, under royal seal, and five horses were sent to Bombay from where they were forwarded to Lahore under the charge of Lieut Alexander Burnes.

Burnes reached Lahore on July 17, 1831. Shām Singh Attārīwālā, one of Ranjīt Singh's chief noblemen, took him out

on a gaily-decorated elephant through the streets of the city. When they reached the Fort, Burnes made homage to the Mahārājā, and presented the letter and horses sent by the English King. Faqīr Azīz-ud-Dīn read out a Persian rendering of the letter. Ranjīt Singh and his courtiers were pleased at the friendly tone of the King's message. One of the horses brought by Alexander Burnes was so huge in size that it came to be known in the royal stables as Hāthī-sā-Ghorā or Elephant-horse.

The English ambassador, who stayed in Lahore for a month, was treated with honour. He was taken to military reviews and shown the royal jewellery and stables. On his way back, he made an offering of two hundred and fifty rupees at the Harimandir at Amritsar and prayed for everlasting friendship between the Sikhs and the English.

Earlier, in April, a mission consisting of Lahnā Singh Majīthīā, Faqīr Azīz-ud-Dīn, Harī Singh Nalwā, Dhannā Singh Malwaī, Dīwān Motī Rām and Ajīt Singh Sandhānwālīā had visited Lord William Bentinck at Simla. It was received by the Governor-General with much ceremony. A ball, which was attended by the famous Lola Montez among others, was held at Government House in honour of the guests.

Lord William Bentinck was so much impressed by the embassy that he wished to see more of such exchanges take place and, if possible, to meet the Sikh sovereign. Apart from satisfying his personal curiosity, he thereby desired to proclaim widely the complete friendship which existed between the British and the Lahore Darbār. He charged Captain Wade, the Political Agent at Ludhiānā, to carry a letter of thanks to Ranjīt Singh and find out privately if he would be agreeable to a meeting with him.

Captain Wade arrived at Adīnānagar, at the foot of the hills, where Ranjīt Singh was passing the hot season. Suchet Singh Dogrā, Jamādār Khushāl Singh and Jawālā Singh Padhānīā received him on the first day with a *ziāfat* of five thousand rupees and 101 jars of sweetmeat. The next morning, he was informed that Desā Singh Majīthīā and Dhannā Singh Malwaī would come and conduct him to the presence of the Mahārājā. Faqīr Azīz-ud-Dīn, as usual, read out aloud the Governor-General's letter.

Captain Wade was subsequently received in audience on many occasions. Ranjīt Singh welcomed the suggestion of a meeting with the Governor-General. Ropar, on the River Sutlej, which marked the boundary between the two States, was fixed as a convenient place for the interview. Great preparations were made on both sides to give *eclat* to the occasion.

A beautiful spot on the right bank of the river was chosen for Ranjīt Singh's camp. An area of about eight acres of land was marked out and the space between the intended pavilions was sown with a quick-growing herb and kept constantly watered. When the pavilions and tents were ready, they looked splendid amid patches of bright green. Nothing could exceed the grandeur of these tents. Supported on gilt pillars, they gleamed with the richest hangings of crimson, purple and gold. The roofs were embroidered and fringed in the most costly manner. A wall of *kanāts* with a lining of yellow satin enclosed the tents on three sides.

In front ran the river reflecting the gorgeous scene upon its glassy surface. This spectacle of colour and magnificence in a setting of hills and woody valleys presented an enchanting view. The tents of the soldiers in the distance formed a fine finish to the landscape.

Ranjīt Singh left Lahore on October 15, 1831. His entrance into his camp was marked by impressive ceremony and display. He was received by his troops and courtiers, superbly arrayed. A squadron of lancers wore handsome dress in the European style. The artillery consisting of forty guns was similarly well appointed. In the centre stood officers decked out in gold and gems. As the guns announced the arrival of Ranjīt Singh, a swarm of elephants appeared upon the scene. They were surrounded on all sides by cavalry. Seated in the gold *howdah* on a stately elephant came the hero of the brilliant cavalcade. The guns boomed on both sides of the river to bid him welcome.

Bentinck had been waiting for Ranjīt Singh on the left bank of the Sutlej. He had brought out a large escort of squadrons of 16th Lancers, 31st Foot, Colonel Skinner's Irregular Horse and eight guns of horse artillery. As soon as the Mahārājā arrived in his camp, the Governor-General sent Major-General

Ramsay and his own principal secretary to wait upon him. They were received with a salute of fifteen guns. The visit was returned by Ranjīt Singh's eldest son and heir apparent, Kharak Singh, who, accompanied by Harī Singh Nalwā, Sangat Singh of Jīnd, Attar Singh Sandhānwālīā, Shām Singh Attārīwālā and Gulāb Singh, went to the Governor-General's camp to convey to him the Mahārājā's greetings. A 17-gun salute was fired in Kharak Singh's honour. After this exchange of courtesies, October 26 was fixed for the meeting between the two rulers.

A party of Englishmen came to conduct Ranjīt Singh to the Governor-General's camp. The Mahārājā had sent in advance 3,000 picked horsemen, dressed in splendid yellow silk. They went across the river and formed themselves into rows for him to pass through. Ranjīt Singh, who as a rule dressed in a simple manner, had turned out in his regalia. His pearls and jewels were of the rarest description. His train of one hundred elephants, richly decorated, and a large number of nobles and courtiers in their glittering brocades and diamonds, rolled on in stately formation.

At the other end, the British troops formed a street in the middle of which Ranjīt Singh was met by the Governor-General and the Commander-in-Chief. The two chiefs shook hands and greeted each other. Ranjīt Singh crossed into the Governor-General's *howdah* and they proceeded together to the tents of audience which had been especially erected for the occasion. An outer tent was occupied by important European gentlemen some of whom were presented to Ranjīt Singh, who talked to them in his usual easy and vivacious manner. After a brief stay in this tent, he was taken to the inner one for a more private conference with the Governor-General. The Mahārājā and the Governor-General sat in gold chairs. On one side were seated the English officers, on the other the Sikh *sardārs*. The latter were dressed, like the Mahārājā, in yellow, the colour of spring. Ranjīt Singh with his natural grace and ready wit, imparted the atmosphere a liveliness belying the formal character of the occasion.

Presently, two hundred trays laden with presents were brought in. Dresses of honour were laid out for Kharak Singh and the ministers. At 10 o'clock, after nearly an hour's stay, the Mahārājā left for his camp. At the door, he paraded

before the Governor-General his favourite horses. As he passed through the lines of British troops, he stopped to examine the different corps and asked minute questions about their arms and equipment. Twenty-one guns were fired in the British camp at his departure; fifty guns saluted him in his own.

On the following day, the Governor-General returned the visit. Kharak Singh and Sher Singh received him across the river to bring him to the royal camp. The Governor-General was escorted by the Lancers, with their mounted band. Ranjīt Singh's troops formed a line from the bridge to the tents. The Mahārājā, riding his famous elephant Indargaj, met the Governor-General outside the tents. They shook hands and the Governor-General shifted from his elephant to that of the Mahārājā. Slowly they moved towards the main camp.

Twenty-one guns saluted the Governor-General as he alighted from the elephant. He was led into the tent the inside of which presented a scene of unmatched magnificence. The furnishings were in keeping with the display outside. The ground was spread with gorgeous shawls and carpets. In the centre was the royal throne on which were placed two gold chairs. The canopy above was inlaid with gems and jewels.

The Mahārājā and the Governor-General took their seats on the throne. The officers and *sardārs* formed themselves into rows on either side. Nearly a hundred *sardārs* were introduced to the Governor-General. The Governor-General, who had closely watched Ranjīt Singh's troops as he came to the camp, was further impressed by the fine-looking knights, elegantly arrayed in their polished armour and costly silks and diamonds.

The two dignitaries talked in a friendly manner. The Governor-General admired the rich style of the furnishings of the tent. The Koh-i-Nūr shone on Ranjīt Singh's left arm, adding to the brilliance of the scene. The presents for the Governor-General were brought forth. Handsomely-worked shawls and jewels were laid out in trays. The Mahārājā put a pearl necklace round Bentinck's neck and presented him with two horses and an elephant with a silver *howdah*. After staying for nearly four hours, the Governor-General took his leave.

The next day, Ranjīt Singh invited the Governor-General to dinner. Hundreds of dainty dishes were prepared. General Harī

Singh Nalwā, Jamādār Khushāl Singh and other *sardārs* went to conduct the Governor-General to Ranjīt Singh's camp. The Governor-General was accompanied by a large number of officers and ladies. Ranjīt Singh received them at the door of the tent. The party went on till midnight. The choicest wines were served, and the Mahārājā's Indian and French bands were in attendance.

The Governor-General held an entertainment in honour of the Mahārājā the following day. The English camp was handsomely decorated. The Governor-General came out to receive Ranjīt Singh and conducted him into the tent where the guests, including a large number of ladies, had been awaiting his arrival. The British band and Ranjīt Singh's joviality and friendliness enlivened the party.

On the fifth day, Ranjīt Singh witnessed a parade of English troops and also saw artillery practice. Then the English officers showed their skill in the use of arms. Ranjīt Singh's officers, General Harī Singh Nalwā, General Ventura, Rājā Suchet Singh and General Ilāhī Bakhsh also joined in the sports. Ranjīt Singh himself came forward and, riding his famous horse Lailī at great speed, made three cuts with his sword on a brass vessel in such a manner that they took the form of a flower.

On the last day, Lord William Bentinck was present at a parade of the Sikh troops. He was struck by the exercises of the infantry and the precision of the artillery. A farewell *darbār* was held after which the camps broke up and started their homeward march.

The Ropar interview has been described as a meeting on "the field of cloth of gold." Such was the splendour that surrounded the event.

CHAPTER XIV

A ROYAL WEDDING

To have established such precise standards of regal usage and hospitality was remarkable for one born to a small worldly inheritance. Ranjīt Singh's patrimony did not amount to more than a few villages precariously held in those turbulent days, and his authority scarcely coincided with any recognizable or settled geographical demarcation. He carved out sovereignty for himself in his own lifetime after a protracted and bitter struggle, but the tradition of noble pomp and splendour he set up was unmatched by royalties of much older origin. There could be no better example of his love of magnificence and *eclat* than the wedding of his grandson, Prince Nau Nihāl Singh, which was one of the most lavish celebrations in the history of the country. Ranjīt Singh had nearly half a million people assembled to claim charity on the occasion and gave away in a single day a sum of twenty lakhs of rupees.

Nau Nihāl Singh was at that time sixteen years old. He had already shown his ability as a soldier, having taken part in several warlike campaigns. It was during one such campaign that Shām Singh Attārīwālā, a leading Sikh *sàrdār*, pledged the hand of his daughter to him.

Ranjīt Singh sent invitations to the British Governor-General, the Commander-in-Chief, Sir Henry Fane, his old friend, Sir Charles Metcalfe, then governor of Agra, and the chiefs of a number of Indian states. The rulers of Patiālā, Farīdkot, Kapūrthalā, Naraingarh, Nābhā, Jīnd, Mālerkotlā, Kalsīā, Mandī and Suket responded to the invitation. Sir Henry Fane, the Commander-in-Chief, with Lady Fane and staff, attended on behalf of the Governor-General.

As Sir Henry crossed the Sutlej at Harīke on March 3, 1837,

he was met by Prince Sher Singh. The guests were impressed by the host's good nature and quiet and gentlemanly manner. The young prince at once made friends with Sir Henry Fane, who came to see him in his tent on the following day. He had with him an artist, who, standing in front of the two chiefs, made a likeness of Sir Henry. The guests admired the furnishings of Sher Singh's camp, especially his dressing room which was filled with perfumes from France and other European luxuries of toilet.

The Commander-in-Chief, accompanied by Sher Singh and his train, left for Amritsar. Three kilometres from the city, they were met by Kharak Singh, father of the bridegroom. Sir Henry Fane was presented with a *ziāfat* of five thousand rupees. He entered the city under a salute of guns fired from the Fort of Gobindgarh. Upon reaching his camp, he fired a salute of twenty-one guns in honour of the Sikh ruler. Then he came to visit the Mahārājā who was staying in his garden-house, the Rām Bāgh. Ranjīt Singh wore a green turban and had a row of pearls round his neck. The canopy under which he sat was made of beautiful Kashmiri shawls, inlaid with silver. It had silver poles to support it. The dresses and jewels of the Mahārājā's court were of the richest quality. Hīrā Singh, son of Dhiān Singh, looked one mass of jewels. Ranjīt Singh received Sir Henry with his usual geniality. Some of the many questions he asked him were about the size of the East India Company's army, the number of battles he had been in and the way the English cast their guns.

In the evening was held the ceremony of presenting offerings to the bridegroom. Sir Henry presented eleven thousand rupees, Dhiān Singh one lakh and twenty-five thousand and Gulāb Singh, Suchet Singh and Misr Rūp Lāl fifty-one thousand each. Other chiefs and guests made offerings according to their rank and position. The presents were altogether valued at fifty lakhs of rupees.

The wedding party started for the bride's place on elephants richly equipped and decorated. Passing through the streets of the city, the procession reached the Harimandir where blessings were sought for the bridegroom. The Mahārājā put the bridal crown of the rarest pearls, hung on gold threads, on the forehead of Nau Nihāl Singh.

The party formed a gorgeous procession composed of silk-

clad men, mounted upon stately elephants. Unique was the splendour and bustle of the occasion. Hundreds of thousands of spectators, who had come from all parts of the country, lined up on both sides of the road from Amritsar to Attārī, the bride's village. All around, there were crowds of men cheering the wedding party. Ranjīt Singh had ordered bags, each containing coins worth two thousand rupees, to be placed at the disposal of the guests. The money was being showered on the spectators. Ranjīt Singh, the members of the royal family and the more prominent guests cast handfuls of gold mohurs instead of silver coins. At the head of the cavalcade was a moving throne, decked out in handsome style, on which music and dancing continued all the way.

Shām Singh Attārīwālā, the host, had made equally elaborate arrangements for the reception of the guests. The passage to his mansion was spread with velvet and brocade. The guns and fireworks were let off as the party arrived. The Mahārājā was received with an offering of one hundred and one gold mohurs and five horses, Kharak Singh with fifty-one mohurs and a horse and the other princes with eleven mohurs and a horse each. The guests were then conducted to the top floor of Sardār Shām Singh's castle. The bridegroom sat between the Mahārājā and the British Commander-in-Chief, under a canopy embroidered with silver and gold. Ranjīt Singh wore on his arm the Koh-i-Nūr.

After nine o'clock began the religious ceremony. The air became thick with the holy chants and with felicitations to the Mahārājā from all sides. A display of fireworks was subsequently held in the centre of the large enclosure where camps had been laid out for the Mahārājā and Sir Henry Fane and other guests. The entertainment and gaiety went on far into the night.

The next day, Ranjīt Singh surpassed himself in bounty. The multitude of poor people who had gathered for alms and other spectators were assembled into a space of about eight kilometres in circumference, surrounded by soldiers. No one was allowed to emerge except at the eighty exits where officers were stationed to distribute money. Each one was given a *butkī*, worth five rupees. As a person received his *butkī*, he was sent out of the circle and not allowed to enter again. A sum of twenty lakhs of rupees was distributed in this manner.

The Mahārājā and the guests witnessed the sports which comprised wrestling bouts, elephant-fighting and contests in lancing and swordsmanship. In the afternoon the bride's dowry was displayed. It consisted of eleven elephants, 101 horses, 101 cows,101 buffalos, 101 camels, all fully caparisoned, hundreds of gold and silver utensils, five hundred pairs of shawls, ornaments, jewels and silk and brocade dresses worth lakhs of rupees. Shām Singh Attārīwālā also gave presents to the Mahārājā and the guests.

After two days of feasting and merriment, the party left for Lahore. The festival of Holi being near, the Mahārājā would not let his guests depart. In the evening, he wanted to give a banquet in the Shālāmār Gardens, but, since the water required for the fountains had not yet come from the Rāvī sufficiently far down the canal, the entertainment was postponed until the following evening.

The Shālāmār Gardens were brilliantly illuminated with rows of small earthen lamps, placed at regular intervals on the building and down the sides of the walls and tanks. At every ten or twelve yards were placed coloured lamps. The fountains playing in the light of these lamps produced a charming effect. The English ladies were allowed to see the fireworks and a special tent was erected for them on the top of a house. The Mahārājā looked after the guests personally. The festive eve was prolonged to the small hours of the morning.

On the third day, Ranjīt Singh visited Sir Henry in his camp. While passing through the troops which had been drawn up in his honour, he stopped to see the King's 16th Lancers. He had met these troops at Ropar at the time of William Bentinck's visit.

Ranjīt Singh turned the formal occasion into a pleasant function by his natural and easy manner and by his well-informed questions and conversations. He asked the Commander-in-Chief if the Russian interest was doing the English much harm in Persia and whether Persia could give Russia any useful aid in the event of their advancing towards India. Sir Henry took him into another camp and showed him the presents he had brought for him. Among these were an elephant, eight horses, a double-barrelled gun and a brace of pistols. The

Commander-in-Chief apologized that the presents had been collected in a hurry as he had not had sufficient warning of the visit.

Sir Henry Fane saw a review of Ranjīt Singh's troops on the bank of the River Rāvī. They were all very well turned out and armed in the European fashion. The Commander-in-Chief praised their skill and discipline. Ranjīt Singh was present at a similar review of the Commander-in-Chief's escort.

One day the guests were invited to see the court jewels. Ranjīt Singh's *toshākhānā* contained a vast variety of stones, armlets, bangles and necklaces, each of exceeding cost. The Koh-i-Nūr, of course, was the centre of attraction. Then the guests went to a grand entertainment given by Ranjīt Singh in honour of the English ladies. The ladies were also taken inside to meet the Mahārājā's wives. The senior Mahārānī, with her entourage, received them, Mrs Ventura and Mrs Allard acting as interpreters.

As the festival of Holī for which the guests had been detained arrived, the Mahārājā invited them all to his camp. They were provided with baskets full of red powder balls, large bowls of yellow saffron and gold squirts. As soon as the guests were seated, the Mahārājā poured colour on Sir Henry's bald head, while Dhiān Singh rubbed him all over with red powder. This was a signal for general colour splashing and ball throwing. The worst sufferer in the rejoicing was the Afghan ambassador who had come from Kandahar.

After a fortnight's stay in Lahore, Sir Henry Fane asked leave to depart. A farewell *darbār* was held and presents were brought forth for him and his party. Ranjīt Singh shook each of the guests by the hand and wished him goodbye. Prince Sher Singh came as far as the Sutlej to see off the guests. On the bank of the river, Sir Henry Fane held a *darbār* in his honour and presented him with a buggy and horse.

In honour of Nau Nihāl Singh's wedding, Ranjīt Singh started an Order of Merit which was known as Kaukab-i-Iqbāl-i-Punjab, Star of the Prosperity of the Punjab. The order had three grades, each having its own medal. The medals bore the effigy of Ranjīt Singh on one side and had silk ribands of gold and scarlet colour. They were in the shape of a star and were meant to be worn round the neck. The first-grade medal was ornamented with one diamond. It was meant for the

members of the royal family and those chiefs who showed exceptional devotion to the person of the Mahārājā and his family. The second-grade medal, with a diamond and an emerald set in it, was bestowed on loyal courtiers and *sardārs*. The third contained a single emerald and was open to the civil and militaıy officers who had rendered some special service to the State.

CHAPTER XV

KING-KILLING IN LAHORE

The spirit of stern religious discipline and sacrifice which had supported Sikhs through a critical period of their history and led them to power and glory was dimmed in the pomp and splendour of sovereignty. Ranjīt Singh's death on June 27, 1839, left a deep hiatus. The Khālsā lost a leader who had, by his commanding personality, foresight and skill, become their *beau ideal* and secured them the status of a sovereign people. The British had by then taken practically the whole of India, except the Punjab and Sind, and their empire bordered on the southern confines of the Sikh State. The process of British expansion, which had temporarily been halted by the Sikhs, who had built up a strong bulwark in the Punjab, was, after the death of Ranjīt Singh, again set on its inexorable course.

All these factors combined to weaken the Sikh kingdom. Intrigue and murder became rampant and a tragic fate overtook the country of Ranjīt Singh. The *denouement* of this pathetic drama was provided by the Anglo-Sikh wars which resulted in the annexation of the Punjab to the British dominions.

Three powerful men from Jammu—Gulāb Singh, Dhiān Singh and Suchet Singh—played a subtle role and put into motion a chain of proceedings which brought about the demolition of Sikh power. These three brothers, who had joined Ranjīt Singh's service as soldiers of fortune, gradually came to occupy positions of much influence at his court. At the time of the Sikh ruler's death, Dhiān Singh was the most powerful man in the Punjab. He was prime minister to Ranjīt Singh's son and successor, Kharak Singh, and had securely laid out his net inside the palace as well as outside to maintain himself in power. Gulāb Singh and Suchet Singh also held high offices under Kharak Singh.

But they were not content with this. They had their eyes on the throne itself and the main object of their grand strategy was to crown Dhiān Singh's son, Hīrā Singh, king of the Punjab. During Ranjīt Singh's lifetime they had vied with one another in showing their devotion and loyalty towards him and his family. It is said that once Dhiān Singh, who had fallen under suspicion, vowed himself to ascetical self-denial and would not sleep on bed until he had obtained the Mahārājā's pardon by inviting him to Jammu and holding, in expiation, an elaborate religious ceremony. But no sooner had Ranjīt Singh died than the three brothers touched the springs of a plot which engulfed the palace, the court and the army, and brought disaster and chaos to the country.

The first shot in this murderous campaign was fired by the youngest brother, Suchet Singh. In the small hours of the morning of October 9, 1839, barely three months after Ranjīt Singh's death, Dhiān Singh intruded upon the privacy of the royal chambers, leading into Mahārājā Kharak Singh's bedroom a party of conspirators. He had been secretly plotting against the Mahārājā and had given currency to false stories that the latter was surreptitiously planning to make over the Punjab to the British and surrender to them six *ānnās* in every rupee of the State revenue. To lend credence to these rumours, some fake letters were prepared and discreetly intercepted. Gulāb Singh was charged to work upon Kharak Singh's son, Kanwar Nau Nihāl Singh, who was then travelling in his company from Peshawar to Lahore. Misled by these fictitious tales, the young prince was estranged from his father.

On the fateful eve, Dhiān Singh sent out orders to the army to keep quiet in spite of any nightly alarm. Colonel Alexander Gardner, an American in the Sikh service, was commanded to station his troops at the gates of the royal Fort.

At midnight, Dhiān Singh entered the Fort with his party. Answering the sentry's who-goes-there cry, he said, "The Mahārājā Sāhib is going to Amritsar for ablutions in the *sarovar* (the sacred tank), and we have come to escort him." As they came close to the royal chamber, they saw the Mahārājā's *gadwaī*, morning attendant, returning after laying bath for his master, who, like a true Sikh, rose early in the

morning to recite the sacred hymns. Suchet Singh fired upon the *gadwaī* with his small English rifle, killing him on the spot. For his indiscretion in raising a premature alarm, he was reproved by his eldest brother, Gulāb Singh, who slapped him angrily on the face.

The party then burst upon the Mahārājā's room. Chet Singh Bājwā, a trusted courtier who had also been the prince's tutor, slept in the same room. Hearing the rifle shot, he ran inside to hide himself. Dhiān Singh arrogantly questioned the Mahārājā where his favourite Chet Singh was. He and his men carried out a thorough search of the apartments and, as they were returning from their fruitless quest, one of them saw a glint of light in the corner of a dark corridor. This was the reflection from the ill-fated Chet Singh's sword. His enemies immediately turned back. Gulāb Singh and Dhiān Singh strove with each other as to who should first strike the victim. The latter's envious nature was so aroused at the sight of Chet Singh that he, disregarding the advice of his elder brother, fell on him with the fierceness of a wolf and pierced his chest with a mighty thrust of his spear.

The murder inside the Fort of Ranjīt Singh, a mention of whose name struck terror into the hearts of the evil-minded, was the prologue to a long-drawn drama of intrigue and slaughter.

Kharak Singh was removed from the Fort and he remained virtually a prisoner in the hands of Dhiān Singh. Kanwar Nau Nihāl Singh ruled in his place, but he was helpless against the machinations of his prime minister, who contrived to keep father and son separated from each other. Dhiān Singh subjected Kharak Singh to strict restraint upon the pretext that he might not escape to the British dominions. Doses of slow poison were administered to the Mahārājā, who was at last delivered by death on November 5, 1840, from a lonely and disgraceful existence.

The same day was chosen for enacting another foul crime. As Kanwar Nau Nihāl Singh was walking back after the cremation of his father, a gateway was brought down upon him at the entrance to the palace through the Hazūrī Garden. He fell to the ground, but escaped serious injury. Dhiān Singh

who had kept a *pālkī* ready at hand at once ordered that the prince be taken inside the Fort. One of the *pālkī*-bearers, who were from Colonel Gardner's regiment, later told his officer that the prince had sustained a minor injury above his right ear and that the mark of blood on the pillow was no bigger than the size of a silver rupee. But this was a lucky bearer who escaped with his life to tell the story. His companions were murdered to smother the secret.

Dhiān Singh had the gates of the Fort locked up, reserving to himself the authority to allow or refuse admittance as he desired. None of the *sardārs* were allowed to go inside and see Nau Nihāl Singh. Lahnā Singh Majīthīā was rudely pushed away by Dhiān Singh as he was entering the Fort with the Kanwar Sāhib's *pālkī*. The *sardār* took the insult to heart and went back to his village, never to return to Lahore. As Kanwar Nau Nihāl Singh's mother and wife smote their heads against the Fort gates wailing and tearing off their hair in helpless anguish, Dhiān Singh and his men were busy inside bashing the young prince's head with bricks and stones. To tell the crowds outside that he was being well looked after, Dhiān Singh loudly asked Dr Honigberger if they might not give Kanwar Sāhib some *shorbā* (soup). The doctor in his autobiography, *Thirty-five Years in the East*, meaningfully remarks that he knew what *shorbā* the Kanwar Sāhib needed.

For three days the news of Kanwar Nau Nihāl Singh's death was kept secret.

Dhiān Singh now openly suggested to Mahārānī Chand Kaur, the widow of Kharak Singh, to adopt his son, Hīrā Singh, and proclaim him Mahārājā of the Punjab. On her refusal to do so, Dhiān Singh became her sworn enemy. His brother, Gulāb Singh, who looked after the Mahārānī's property, absconded from the Fort with several cartloads of gold and silver. Syad Muhammad Latīf thus describes Gulāb Singh's flight from Lahore in his *History of the Panjab*:

> Rājā Gulāb Singh carried away all the money and valuables belonging to the Mahārānī Chand Kaur under pretence of keeping it safely for her.....He carried off the accumulated treasures of Ranjīt Singh which were in the Fort. Sixteen carts were filled with rupees and other silver coins, while

500 horsemen were each entrusted with a bag of gold mohurs, and his orderlies were also entrusted with jewellery and other valuable articles. The costly *pashmīnās*, and rich wardrobes, and the best horses in Ranjīt Singh's stables, were all purloined by Gulāb Singh on the occasion of his evacuating Lahore.

The next plan of the prime minister was to get Mahārānī Chand Kaur out of his way. She was staying alone in Kanwar Nau Nihāl Singh's palace inside the city. Dhiān Singh replaced her old maidservants by hillswomen from his own part of the country. The latter, who were in his pay, gave the Mahārānī poison in her food and eventually killed her, smashing her head with wooden pikes from the kitchen.

Ranjīt Singh's second son, Sher Singh, who came to the throne after the death of Kharak Singh, was opposed by the Sandhānwālīā *sardārs*. Two of them—Attar Singh and Ajīt Singh—crossed over to the British territory and went to stay in Calcutta waiting for a more favourable opportunity to come back to the Punjab. Dhiān Singh made friends with the Sandhānwālīās and encouraged them in their secret designs against Sher Singh. The British also supported their cause and twice sent Clarke, one of their senior political officers, to Lahore to intercede on behalf of Attar Singh Sandhānwālīā and Ajīt Singh Sandhānwālīā, and persuade the Mahārājā to let them return to the Punjab. Sher Singh at last pardoned them, and both of them arrived at Lahore on May 12, 1843.

The Sandhānwālīās showed little gratitude for the favour done to them. In collusion with Dhiān Singh, they resumed their intrigue as soon as they entered the Punjab. On September 15, 1843, when Sher Singh was out in the morning to witness wrestling bouts near the Shālāmar Gardens, outside Lahore, he was requested by the Sandhānwālīā *sardārs* to inspect their troops. At the parade, Ajīt Singh Sandhānwālīā sought permission to show the Mahārājā a carbine he had obtained from an Englishman in Calcutta. As the Mahārājā put forth his hand to take hold of the weapon, Ajīt Singh pressed the triggers and the loaded barrels were emptied into his broad chest. "Oh! What treachery!" This was all the Mahārājā could say as he dropped to the ground dead.

For the fourth time in four years the Punjab was plunged into mourning.

How thoroughly submissive to the authority and prestige of Ranjīt Singh this Ajīt Singh Sandhānwālīā, who had now assassinated his son Sher Singh, was would be illustrated by an incident which took place in 1838. He was on a visit to Simla with a Sikh embassy. The Governor-General, Lord Auckland, gave a ball in their honour. He had been planning to have a boat designed in the shape of a snake and make a present of it to Ranjīt Singh. While talking to Ajīt Singh, the Governor-General happened to ask what colours and decorations the Mahārājā would prefer. So great was Ajīt Singh's perplexity at this simple question that, in the words of the Governor-General's sister, Emily Eden, recorded in her Diary, one could hear his heart beat. Ajīt Singh was afraid to make a categorical answer for his sovereign even on such a minor point as this.

The shots that killed Sher Singh were a signal for the elder Sandhānwālīā—Lahnā Singh—to pounce upon Partāp Singh, the twelve-year-old son of the Mahārājā. That being the day following the full-moon night, the young prince was being weighed in a garden near by against grain and silver to be given away in charity. Lahnā Singh, who was in a grandfather's relationship to the prince, seized him by the hair and cut him to pieces. "Don't kill me, grandfather! I renounce all claim to my father's throne. I shall go to the forests and become a *sādhū*. I shall never return to Lahore." These pathetic cries of Partāp Singh were forever muffled with a cruel blow of the sword.

With the heads of Mahārājā Sher Singh and Kanwar Partāp Singh pitched on the spears, the Sandhānwālīās marched towards the city. They were met, on the way, by Dhiān Singh who joined the party. The prime minister had made sure that the guards and other troops in the city would offer them no challenge. Reaching the Fort, Sandhānwālīās and the Dogrās held a mutual conference to divide the spoils amongst themselves. But during these negotiations, Ajīt Singh settled argument with Dhiān Singh by killing him on the spot with a bullet from his rifle. The Sandhānwālīās' next target was Dhiān Singh's son, Hīrā Singh, who was well known in the Sikh

armies and could easily arouse them in the name of his deceased patron, Ranjīt Singh. They invited him to the Fort and, in support of their *bona fides*, sent him a ring removed from the finger of his father's corpse. A premonition on the part of Suchet Singh saved Hīrā Singh from falling into the trap. The elder Dogrā suspected foul play and told the messengers to bring a note signed by Dhiān Singh before his son could accompany them.

The news of Dhiān Singh's death soon became known outside the Fort. Hīrā Singh started crying like a child and bewailed before the troops how the Sandhānwālīās had murdered their sovereign, Sher Singh, and his prime minister, Dhiān Singh. Pledged to revenge, the soldiers marched upon the Fort and laid siege to it. The Sandhānwālīās offered strong resistance, but Lahnā Singh and Ajīt Singh were both killed.

On September 18, 1843, Ranjīt Singh's five-year-old son, Duleep Singh, was proclaimed Mahārājā of the Punjab and Hīrā Singh assumed the position of prime minister. The latter announced an increase of two rupees and a half in the pay of the troops. He appointed one Pandit Jallhā as his deputy and confiscated the Sandhānwālīās' fiefs. Their houses in their ancestral village of Rājāsānsī were razed to the ground. Attar Singh Sandhānwālīā once again left the Punjab to seek shelter with the British. Hīrā Singh also had Bhāī Gurmukh Singh, a revered Sikh divine, and Misr Belī Rām murdered for having opposed his father's proposal to crown him Mahārājā after the death of Kanwar Nau Nihāl Singh.

But this was not the end of the melancholy drama. The conspirators had gone so far in their guilt that there could neither be retraction nor peace for them. Tormented by the apparitions of their own misdeeds, they saw dangers lurking in all corners and desperately went on from one crime to another. In this mad orgy of blood, no one came forward to defend the heritage of the Khālsā which had been built by the valour and sacrifices of the Sikhs.

Hīrā Singh saw in Jawāhir Singh, brother of the Queen Mother, Mahārānī Jind Kaur, a rival and promptly put him in gaol. He also disgraced and exiled from Lahore his own uncle, Suchet Singh. At the instance of Gulāb Singh, who helped concoct some false letters, he confiscated the lands of Kanwar

Kashmīrā Singh and Kanwar Peshaurā Singh, two of the surviving sons of Ranjīt Singh. He also sent a force against them under Gulāb Singh. But the Sikh troops refused to attack the princes. Gulāb Singh had recourse to the usual stratagem of tempting the army with promises of enhancing their pay. With this bait, Dhiān Singh, Hīrā Singh and other Dogrā leaders had frequently attempted to subvert the loyalty of the Sikh soldiery. The assault on Kashmīrā Singh and Peshaurā Singh had caused great resentment among the troops who turned against the Dogrā prime minister. Hīrā Singh was obliged to restore the princes' *jāgīrs* and release Jawāhir Singh from captivity.

Suchet Singh, who had been living in Jammu since his exile, considered this a favourable opportunity for returning to Lahore. He reached Shāhdarā with a small body of troops on March 26, 1844, and tried to win over the armies with offers of rewards and prizes. Hīrā Singh now used the second favourite weapon in the Dogrā armoury and told the troops that Suchet Singh was a friend of the British and that he had eighteen lakhs of rupees in deposit with them in their bank at Ferozepore. This had the desired effect and the Sikh soldiers forsook Suchet Singh, who was killed in a clash that followed.

Hīrā Singh's intrigue reached its culminating point in his designs against Bābā Bīr Singh, a pious Sikh, who lived in a small village, Naurangābād, secluded from courtly machinations. He was a true well-wisher of the dynasty of Ranjīt Singh and was deeply grieved at the disaster which had overtaken it through the envy of the courtiers. His personal influence was a source of great perturbation to Hīrā Singh who sent troops to attack his citadel in the village, where Prince Kashmīrā Singh and Attar Singh Sandhānwālīā had taken asylum. Bābā Bīr Singh forbade his Sikhs to fight back saying, "How can we attack our own brethren ?" He was in meditation in the presence of the Holy Book, when he was killed with a shell from enemy fire. Kashmīrā Singh and Attar Singh also lost their lives in this attack.

This assault upon Bābā Bīr Singh and a subsequent attempt by Hīrā Singh's favourite, Pandit Jallhā, to poison Mahārānī Jind Kaur aroused the ire of the Sikh army. Hīrā Singh

abandoned Lahore with 4,000 of his trusted troops and several cartloads of gold and silver removed from the treasury. But a Sikh force led by Jawāhir Singh and Shām Singh Attārīwālā overtook him on the way. Hīrā Singh and his favourite Pandit Jallhā were killed (December 21, 1844), and the Sikh *sardārs* returned to Lahore with the treasures which were being carted away to Jammu.

Jawāhir Singh became prime minister in place of Hīrā Singh. Gulāb Singh, now the sole survivor of the Dogrā trinity, had fallen in arrears with the tribute in lieu of the lands in his possession. The new prime minister despatched Shām Singh Attārīwālā with an armed force to Jammu for the realization of the dues. Gulāb Singh made his peace, offering to pay the tribute regularly in addition to a fine of thirty-five lakhs of rupees. But the Dogrās ambushed one of the *sardārs*, Fateh Singh Mān, as he was returning to his camp, and killed him. This enraged the Khālsā army and they set upon the city. After three days' fighting, Gulāb Singh surrendered and was brought back to Lahore in custody. He secured his release with a promise to discharge the arrears.

Marching from Siālkot, Kanwar Peshaurā Singh occupied the Fort of Attock. Jawāhir Singh ordered Fateh Khān Tiwānā and Chattar Singh of Attārī to proceed towards Attock and recover the Fort from Peshaurā Singh. Seeing that the armies were in sympathy with the prince, Chattar Singh forbore from assaulting the Fort and started parleys for peace. The Kanwar agreed to vacate the Fort and the next day he set out for Lahore with Chattar Singh and Fateh Khān. On their way, they stopped for the evening at the Sikh shrine of Panjā Sāhib. Peshaurā Singh was captured as he lay asleep and taken back to Attock where he was kept a prisoner before being cruelly put to sword on the night of August 30, 1845.

It was now Jawāhir Singh's turn to pay the penalty for his crime. The army became hostile to him. He and his sister, the Queen Mother, endeavoured to pacify the soldiers, but without avail. A Dogrā *sardār*, Prithvī Singh, was actively engaged in inciting them to avenge Peshaurā Singh's death. On September 12, 1845, he posted himself at the Delhi Gate in Lahore. Riding an elephant, Jawāhir Singh, with the infant-King, Duleep Singh, Ranjīt Singh's youngest son, on his lap, came out to

appeal to the soldiers. His sister, Jind Kaur, riding another elephant was also by his side. Jawāhir Singh's elephant was surrounded by the troops, the Mahārājā was taken away from his lap, and he was fired upon and dragged down to the ground dead.

There were now three candidates for the office of prime minister—Gulāb Singh, Lāl Singh and Tej Singh. Like the Dogrās, these last two had come to Ranjīt Singh's court in search of employment and succeeded in winning his favour. In the lot drawn by Mahārājā Duleep Singh to decide who should be his prime minister, Lāl Singh had fortune on his side. Tej Singh became commander-in-chief of the Sikh army.

CHAPTER XVI

WARS WITH BRITAIN

The English were watching the happenings in the Sikh State with more than a neighbour's interest. They saw their opportunity in the disorder that prevailed, and, disregarding their treaties of friendship with the Sikhs, they started implementing their plans of seizing their country. Even when Ranjīt Singh was alive, symbolizing in his person the unity and glory of the Sikhs' kingdom and their desire to live in amity with their neighbours to the south of the Sutlej, the English had secretly coveted his territories.

Lieut Alexander Burnes, who was deputed to the Sikh capital in 1831 with a friendly letter from the King of England and a present of five horses and a coach, was asked to travel by the Indus and the Sutlej, for "the authorities both in England and India contemplated that much information of a political and geographical nature might be acquired in such a journey." He had been instructed at Bombay that "the depth of water in the Indus, the direction and breadth of the stream its facilities for steam navigation, the supply of fuel on its banks and the conditions of the princes and people who possess the country bordering it, are all points of the highest interest to Government."

Sir Henry Fane, Commander-in-Chief of the British forces in India, who, at the invitation of Ranjīt Singh, had attended the wedding of his grandson, Nau Nihāl Singh, was, in the words of Joseph Davey Cunningham, "ever a careful observer of military means and of soldierly qualities; he formed an estimate of the force which would be required for the complete subjugation of the Punjab." That was in 1838.

Similarly, Colonel Claude Wade, the Political Agent at Ludhiānā, and other British officers while returning through the Punjab after the Afghanistan expedition which was undertaken

jointly with the Sikhs, collected political and geographical information relating to the Sikh territories and prepared memoranda for the civil and military authorities. In fact, the English were in 1841 resolved to conquer the Punjab. Mrs Henry Lawrence, wife of Henry Lawrence who later took the Punjab from the Sikhs, writing to one of her friends, Mrs Cameron, in her letter of May 26, 1841, said:

> Wars, and rumours of wars, are on every side and there seems no doubt that next cold weather will decide the long suspended question of occupying the Punjab; Henry both in his civil and military capacity will probably be called to take a part in whatever goes on.

This letter is quoted in Henry Lawrence's biography by Edwardes and Merivale.

The Afghan insurrection in Kabul on November 2, 1841, which resulted in a complete rout of the British force there, upset the plans for the occupation of the Punjab. The English were obliged to seek help from Mahārājā Sher Singh, who immediately ordered Gulāb Singh to render all possible assistance to General Pollock and Captain Mackeson in their expedition againt Afghanistan. This occasion was utilized by the British officers to detach some of the Mahārājā's courtiers from their allegiance to him. Henry Lawrence considered Gulāb Singh, Dhiān Singh and Avitabile the most likely instruments of British policy and plans so far as the Sikh dominions were concerned. His biographer, Major-General Sir Herbert Edwardes, quotes him as saying, "We need such men as the Rājā [Gulāb Singh] and General Avitabile, and should bind them to us, by the only tie they recognize—self-interest."

Gulāb Singh did not need much temptation to be thrown in his way. Other Darbār officers who readily fell in with the English were Lāl Singh and Tej Singh, two mercenaries from British India, who rose to be prime minister and commander-in-chief, respectively, of the Sikh kingdom. The Sandhānwāliā *sardārs* had fled Lahore and taken refuge with the British. George Russel Clerk, the Political Agent at Ludhiānā, had pleaded hard on their behalf, persuading Mahārājā Sher Singh to forgive

them and let them return to the Punjab. They had carried on with their treasonable designs which culminated in the murder of the Mahārājā and his son, Partāp Singh. The *British Friend of India*, published from London, wrote in December 1843 of these murders in this wise: "We have no proof that Company instigated all the King-Killing in the Punjab since Ranjīt Singh died. . . . We must say we smell a rat."

Lord Ellenborough, who in 1842 replaced Lord Auckland as the Governor-General of India, subscribed to the forward policy of his predecessor and his regime witnessed the invasion of Gwālīor and annexation of Sind, Kaithal and Jytpur. The Punjab figured prominently in his plans, but he thought he was not well provided for a conflict with the Sikhs and wanted some more time to prepare himself. Writing to the Secret Committee of the East India Company on February 11, 1844, he said, "I must frankly confess that when I look at the whole condition of our army I had rather, if the contest cannot be further postponed, that it were at least postponed to November 1845."

How truly this schedule was borne in mind is apparent from the fact that the actual declaration of war was made by the British on December 13, 1845.

Apart from the military preparations, Lord Ellenborough also relied on the network of spies and agents provocateur which was being laid out in the Sikh capital. He had this in mind when he assured the Duke of Wellington, "Depend on it, I will not engage in such an operation hastily or unnecessarily and I will do all I can beforehand to secure certain success if ever I should be obliged to undertake it."

With the arrival of Sir Henry Hardinge, a Peninsula veteran, as Governor-General, British preparations received a further fillip, and the situation was provoked in a manner that left no doubt in the minds of the Sikhs about the intentions of the English. Sir Henry was related to Lord Ellenborough and such was the latter's confidence in him that, before laying down the office, he wrote to Major George Broadfoot, "You will have heard that the Court of Directors have thought it fit to recall me. My successor will carry out all my views. He is my most confidential friend, with whom I have communicated upon all public subjects for thirty years."

Up to 1838, the British troops on the Sikh frontier had

amounted to one regiment at Sabāthū in the hills and two at Ludhiānā, with six pieces of artillery, equalling in all about 2,500 men. The total rose to 8,000 during the time of Lord Auckland who increased the number of troops at Ludhiānā, and created a new military post at Ferozepore, which was actually part of Sikh dominions south of the Sutlej. Lord Ellenborough formed further new stations at Ambālā, Kasaulī and Simla, and placed in all about 14,000 men and 48 field guns on the frontier. Lord Hardinge increased the aggregate force to about 32,000 men, with 68 field guns, besides having 10,000 men with artillery at Meerut.

This continuous movement of troops towards the border aroused the suspicion of the Sikhs, and they were persuaded that the ultimate ambition of the English was to attack the Punjab. To confirm their fears and to further estrange them, there arrived upon the scene Major George Broadfoot with the declared object of exciting hostilities. He took over charge of Anglo-Sikh affairs from Colonel Richmond, the Political Agent on the Punjab frontier. Major Broadfoot was of a bellicose nature and had, out of sheer boredom, applied to the Governor-General for transfer from Burma to a more active station. He also bore the Sikhs a personal grudge, having had differences with them at the time of the Afghanistan campaign.

"One of Major Broadfoot's first acts," says Joseph Davey Cunningham, "was to declare the cis-Sutlej possessions of the Sikhs to be under British protection." He started giving effect to this policy in an aggressive manner and attacked a party of Sikhs who had crossed over the Sutlej into their own territory on a routine visit. The Sikhs exhibited restraint, and their desire to avoid a collision alone saved the situation. But the shot fired upon the party of Sikhs by Major Broadfoot was really the first shot of the Anglo-Sikh war. Major Broadfoot occupied two Sikh villages, near Ludhiānā, on the plea that some fugitives from justice had taken shelter in them. He had also openly advocated that, if something happened to Mahārājā Duleep Singh who was then ill with smallpox, the British troops would march upon Lahore.

In addition to the concentration of troops on the border, an elaborate supply depot was set up by the British at Bassīān, near Rāikot. Under instructions from the Duke of

Wellington, fifty-six pontoons were brought to Ferozepore to be used as a bridge for the troops to cross the Sutlej. The Sikhs were deeply wrought upon by these war preparations across the border, especially by Broadfoot's acts of hostility. The rapid march, in November 1845, of the Governor-General towards the frontier and a report of Sir Charles Napier's speech in the *Delhi Gazette* saying that the British were going to war with the Sikhs filled Lahore with rumours of invasion.

The crossing over, on December 12, 1845, by a batch of Sikhs of the Sutlej was made a pretext by the British for opening hostilities. The Sikhs had landed on their own territory to the south of the river, scrupulously avoiding any encroachment upon British possessions or upon dominions under their protection. That the Sikhs remained true to the treaties of friendship with the British to the last in spite of grave provocation is borne out by British officials and observers themselves.

Writing on January 23, 1845, to Lord Ellenborough in England, Sir Henry Hardinge said:

> Even if we had a case for devouring our ally in adversity we are not ready and could not be ready until the hot winds set in, and the Sutlej became a torrent. Moderation will do us no harm, if in the interval the hills and the plains weaken each other; but on what plea could we attack the Punjab, if this were the month of October and we had our army in readiness?
> Self-preservation may require the dispersion of this Sikh army, the baneful influence of such an example is the evil most to be dreaded, but exclusive of this case, how are we to justify the seizure of our friend's territory who in our adversity assisted us to retrieve our affairs?

G. Carmichael Smyth says in his *Reigning Family of Lahore*:

> Regarding the Punjab war; I am neither of the opinion that the Seiks made an unprovoked attack, nor that we have acted towards them with great forbearance . . . if the Seiks were to be considered entirely an independent State in no way answerable to us, we should not have provoked them—for to assert that the bridge of boats brought from Bombay was not a *causa belli*, but merely a defensive measure, is absurd; besides the Seiks had translations of Sir Charles Napier's speech (as it appeared in the *Delhi Gazette*) that we were going to war with them; and as all European powers would have done under the circumstances, the Seiks thought it as

> well to be first in the field. Moreover, they were not encamped in our territory, but their own.
> . . . and I only ask, had we not departed from the rules of friendship first? The year before the war broke out, we kept the island between Ferozepore and the Punjab, though it belonged to the Seiks, owing to the deep water between us and the island.
> . . . But if on the other hand the treaty of 1809 is said to have been binding between the two Governments then the simple question is, who first departed from the rules of friendship? I am decidedly of the opinion we did.

On December 13, 1845, the Governor-General Lord Hardinge issued a proclamation, announcing war on the Sikhs and declaring all their possessions below the Sutlej forfeit, and hurried his armies from Ambālā and Ludhiānā. The obvious target for the Sikh forces was the important British post of Ferozepore, commanded by Sir John Littler with his seven thousand men. But Lāl Singh, the prime minister of the Sikhs, was in treasonable communication with Captain Peter Nicholson, the Assistant Political Agent. He asked the latter's advice and was told not to attack Ferozepore. This instruction he followed, seducing the Sikhs with an ingenious excuse that, instead of falling upon an easy prey, the Khālsā should exalt their fame by the captivity or death of the Lāt Sāhib [the Governor-General] himself.

On December 18, the Sikhs came in touch with the British army which arrived under Sir Hugh Gough, the Commander-in-Chief, from Ludhiānā. A battle took place at Mudkī, thirty-two kilometres from Ferozepore. Lāl Singh, who headed the Sikh attack, deserted his army and precipitantly fled the field when the Sikhs stood firm in their order, fighting in a resolute and determined manner. The commander's action disturbed the ranks and the Sikhs retired with a loss of seventeen guns. The British suffered heavy casualties, amounting to 872 killed and wounded. Among the dead was General Robert Sale, the defender of Jalālābād.

The second action was fought three days later at Ferozshāh, sixteen kilometres both from Mudkī and Ferozepore. The Governor-General and the Commander-in-Chief, assisted by reinforcements from Ferozepore, made an attack upon the Sikhs who were awaiting them behind strong entrenchments.

The assault was stubbornly resisted. The Sikhs' batteries fired with rapidity and precision. There was confusion in the ranks of the English and their position became increasingly critical. The growing darkness of the winter night reduced them to sore straits. For the moment, history hung on the edge of a sharp precipice. The dream of conquering the Punjab seemed to be fading away from the weary, sleepless eyes of Englishmen huddled on that far-off sandy stretch of land.

During that "night of horrors," the Commander-in-Chief acknowledged, "we were in a critical and perilous state." Counsels of retreat and surrender were raised and despair brooded over the British camp. In the words of General Hope Grant, Sir Henry Hardinge thought it was all up and gave his sword—a present from the Duke of Wellington and which once belonged to Napoleon—and his Star of the Bath to his son, with directions to proceed to Ferozepore, remarking that "if the day were lost, he must fall."

Lāl Singh and Tej Singh again came to the rescue of the English, committing as cold a piece of treachery as history can boast. The former suddenly deserted the Khālsā army during the night and the latter the next morning (December 22) which enabled the British to turn defeat into victory. The British loss was again heavy, 694 killed and 1,721 wounded. The number of casualties among officers was high. Major Broadfoot, the Political Agent, who had done so much to bring about this war, was killed in the battle of Ferozshāh. The Sikhs lost about 2,000 men and seventy-three pieces of artillery.

A temporary cessation of hostilities followed the battle of Ferozshāh. The English were not in a position to assume the offensive and waited for heavy guns and reinforcements to arrive from Delhi. Lāl Singh and Tej Singh allowed them the much needed respite inasmuch as they kept the Sikhs from re-crossing the Sutlej. On Christmas day, the English issued a proclamation assuring rewards and pensions to those non-commissioned Pūrbīā officers and soldiers of the Sikh government who presented themselves before the Governor-General.

A Sikh *sardār*, Ranjodh Singh Majīthīā, crossed the Sutlej in force and was joined by Ajīt Singh of Lādwā from the other side of the river. They marched towards Ludhiānā and burnt

a portion of the cantonment. Sir Harry Smith (afterwards Governor of Cape Colony), who was sent to intercept them, suffered a severe reverse at Baddowāl (January 21), but retrieved his position in the battle of Alīwāl a week later.

The last battle of this campaign took place at Sobhrāon. Early in February, the British received ample stores of ammunition from Delhi and attacked the Sikh position. Lāl Singh had already provided to the English officers the required information for an effective assault. Tej Singh fled as soon as the contest started and damaged the bridge of boats upon the Sutlej, making reinforcement or return of Sikh soldiers impossible. Gulāb Singh stopped sending supplies and rations from Lahore. In the midst of these treacheries, a Sikh warrior, Shām Singh Attārīwālā, symbol of the unflinching will of the Khālsā, vowed before the Guru Granth to fight unto the last and fall in battle rather than retire in defeat. Clad in white silks and riding a white steed, the grey-bearded hero went out into the field of action, pledged to victory or death. He rallied the ranks depleted by traitorous desertions. His courage inspired the Sikhs to make a determined bid to save the day, but the odds were against them. Shām Singh fell fighting in the foremost ranks. So did his dauntless comrades. Cunningham, who was present as an additional aid-de-camp to the Governor-General, describes the last scenes of the battle vividly in his *History*:

> . . . although assailed on either side by squadrons of horse and battalions of foot, no Sikh offered to submit and no disciple of [Guru] Gobind [Singh] asked for quarter. They everywhere showed a front to the victors, and stalked slowly and sullenly away, while many rushed singly forth to meet assured death by contending with a multitude The victors looked with stolid wonderment upon the indomitable courage of the vanquished. . . .

The English crossed the Sutlej and occupied the fort at Kasūr. Here the Sikh *sardārs*, along with Mahārājā Duleep Singh, met the Governor-General. An army of 20,000 Sikhs stood ready at Amritsar and another 15,000 strong near Lahore. The Governor-General, realizing that the Sikhs were far from vanquished, forbore from immediate occupation of the country. He told the *sardārs* that Mahārājā Duleep Singh would continue to be regarded as a friendly sovereign. They were, of course,

dismayed to hear that the English contemplated forfeiture of the Sikh territories between the rivers Beās and Sutlej and the imposition of a war indemnity amounting to a million and a half sterling.

On February 20, 1846, the Governor-General entered the Sikh capital and, on March 9, a treaty of peace was concluded between the English and the Khālsā Darbār. All Sikh territories below the Sutlej were annexed. In lieu of part payment of the expenses of war, Kashmir was taken possession of. The strength of the Sikh army was limited to 20,000 infantry and 12,000 cavalry. All guns used by Sikhs in the war were to be surrendered and the British troops were to be allowed free passage through the Punjab when necessary. Kashmir was sold to Gulāb Singh who had throughout remained friendly to the English. The payments due from him were cut down by one-fourth, and he was allowed to take away money which his brother, Suchet Singh, had kept buried in Ferozepore. At the ceremony held at Amritsar on March 15, 1846, to invest him with the title of Mahārājā, Gulāb Singh expressed his gratitude to the Governor-General saying that he was his *zarkharīd*, i.e. gold-boughten slave. But his ambition was still not satisfied. In one of his letters addressed to Henry Lawrence, he said: "If I am to have only the Kohistan [the hill territory], then I shall be having nothing but stones and trees." Henry Lawrence wrote back: "It seemed to me and to all India, and will doubtless appear to all in England, that Your Highness had cause only of thankfulness, in that you had received much in return for very little."

According to the March agreement, the British force in Lahore was to be withdrawn at the end of the year, but a severer treaty was imposed on the Sikhs before the expiry of that date. Sir Henry Hardinge desired his Agent, Frederick Currie, to persuade the Darbār to request the British for the continuation of their troops in Lahore. The new treaty was signed at Bharowāl on December 16, 1846. Henry Lawrence was appointed Resident with "full authority to direct and control all matters in every department of the State." A Council of Regency, consisting of the nominees of the Resident and headed by Tej Singh, was appointed. The power to make changes in its personnel vested in the Resident, and the British could maintain as many troops in the Punjab as they thought necessary for

the preservation of peace and order. This treaty was to remain in operation until Mahārājā Duleep Singh attained the age of 16. By a proclamation issued in July 1847, the Governor-General, further enhanced the powers of the Resident. The Punjab was thus reduced to complete thraldom.

On October 23, 1847, Sir Henry Hardinge wrote to Henry Lawrence:

> In all our measures taken during the minority we must bear in mind that by the treaty of Lahore, March 1846, the Punjab never was intended to be an independent State. By the clause I added the chief of the State can neither make war or peace, or exchange or sell an acre of territory or admit a European officer, or refuse us a thoroughfare through his territories, or, in fact, perform any act without our permission. In fact the native Prince is in fetters and under our protection and must do our bidding.

The Sikhs resented this gradual liquidation of their sovereignty in the Punjab. In Mahārānī Jind Kaur, described by Lord Dalhousie as the only woman in the Punjab with manly understanding, the British Resident foresaw a rallying point for the well-wishers of the Sikh dynasty. She was kept under close surveillance and Henry Lawrence wrote to her that she could not receive in audience more than five or six *sardārs* in a month and that she should remain in *purdah* like the ladies of the royal families of Nepal, Jodhpur and Jaipur. Even her charities were restricted. Mahārājā Duleep Singh's refusal to anoint Tej Singh, who was invested by the Resident with the title of Rājā, gave him an excuse to take stern action against the Queen Mother. On August 19, 1847, she was taken away, under a strong military escort, from Lahore to Sheikhūpurā where she was interned in the Fort.

Henry Lawrence took leave of absence and travelled back home with Lord Hardinge, who had completed his term in India. The former was replaced by Frederick Currie and the latter by the Earl of Dalhousie.

The new regime confronted a rebellion in the Sikh province of Multān which it utilized as an excuse for the annexation of the Punjab. The British Resident at Lahore increased the levy payable by the governor, Diwān Mūlrāj, who, finding himself unable to comply, resigned his office. Frederick Currie appointed

Sardār Kāhn Singh in his place and sent him to Multān along with two British officers, P.A. Vans Agnew and W.A. Anderson, to take charge from Mūlrāj. The party arrived at Multān on April 18, 1848, and the Diwān vacated the Fort and made over the keys to the representatives of the Lahore Darbār. But his soldiers rebelled and the British officers were set upon in their camp and killed. This was the beginning of the Multān outbreak. Some soldiers of the Lahore escort deserted their officers and joined Mūlrāj's army. Currie received the news at Lahore on April 21, but delayed action. The British troops were maintained at the capital with the specific object of preserving law and order in the State. This Multān challenge was deliberately ignored by the Governor-General, the Commander-in-Chief and the Resident, who all contended that the troops could not be despatched before the hot season was over. The British had never allowed weather to impede their plans when faced with an emergency. In this case the real reason for inaction was the desire of the British to let the insurrection spread so that they could finally resort to a large-scale offensive and abrogate the sovereignty of the Sikhs.

The interval was utilized by the British to further provoke Sikh opinion. Mahārānī Jind Kaur, then under detention in the Fort of Sheikhūpurā, was exiled from the Punjab. She was taken to Ferozepore and thence to Banāras, in the British dominions. Her annual allowance, which according to the Treaty of Bharowāl had been fixed at one and a half lakh of rupees, was reduced to twelve thousand. Her jewellery worth fifty thousand of rupees was forfeited; so was her cash amounting to a lakh and a half. This humiliating treatment of the Mahārānī caused deep resentment among the people of the Punjab. Even the Muslim ruler of Afghanistan, Amīr Dost Muhammad, protested to the British, saying that "such treatment is objectionable to all creeds."

Captain James Abbott, who was adviser, on behalf of the Resident, to Chattar Singh Attārīwālā, the governor of Hazārā, started instigating the Muslim population of the province against their Sikh ruler. He caused him personal annoyance by encroaching upon his authority. Chattar Singh, whose daughter was engaged to Mahārājā Duleep Singh, enjoyed considerable prestige among the *sardārs* of the State. Captain Abbott's conduct

gave rise to misgivings in Chattar Singh's mind, and, alarmed by the general state of uncertainty created by the Multān incident and the deliberateness of British policy, he requested the Resident at Lahore to fix a date for the royal wedding. The British did not regard with favour the proposed alliance between the throne and an influential family in the Punjab. The Resident took no notice of the chief's request. Chattar Singh then asked his son, Rājā Sher Singh, to seek the good offices of his friend, Herbert Edwardes, with whom he had taken part in the Multān campaign on behalf of the Lahore Darbār. Edwardes conveyed the request to his superiors, but received a severe reprimand from the Governor-General who declared his handling of the affair "indiscreet and unbecoming."

Captain Abbott's constant instigations led to a crisis in Hazārā. The Muslims attacked Chattar Singh and his troops. Commandant Canora, an American officer in Sikh artillery, refused to obey the governor, saying that he would take his orders from Captain Abbott. He ordered one of his *havildārs* to fire upon the infantry as it was moving into position. The latter refused to do so and was slain by Canora. Canora also shot down two Sikh officers with his pistol. He was in turn attacked by the infantry and killed. Captain Abbott blamed Chattar Singh for this incident, and, although the Resident, Frederick Currie, did not agree with his conclusions, he forced Chattar Singh to relinquish the governorship of Hazārā and deprived him of his *jāgīr*. Chattar Singh's son, Rājā Sher Singh, who had steadfastly fought on the side of Herbert Edwardes against Diwān Mūlrāj, was greatly exercised as he heard the news. He decided to take his father's part and joined the Diwān's armies on September 14, 1848.

Rājā Sher Singh made a passionate appeal to his countrymen warning them of the fate that awaited the Punjab and inviting them to join his standard in a final bid to preserve their freedom. Many old soldiers of the Khālsā army responded to the call and left their homes to join Diwān Mūlrāj, Rājā Sher Singh and Chattar Singh Attārīwālā. The Governor-General, Lord Dalhousie, rejoiced in the situation, which he had studiously laboured to bring about. At a public banquet on October 5, 1848, at Barrackpore (Calcutta), he announced in his ecstatic rhetoric:

> Unwarned by precedents, uninfluenced by example, the Sikh nation has called for war, and, on my word, Sirs, they shall have it with a vengeance.
> The rebellion of Rājā Sher Singh followed by his army, the rebellion of Sardār Chattar Singh with Darbār army under his command, the state of the troops and of the Sikh population everywhere, have brought matters to that crisis I have for months been looking for, and we are now not on the eve but in the midst of war with the Sikh nation and the kingdom of the Punjab.
> The result of this mad movement to the people and the dynasty of the Sikhs can be no longer matter of discussion or of doubt.
> . . . I have drawn the sword, and have thrown away the scabbard, both in relation to the war immediately before us, and to the stern policy which that war must precede and establish.

The Resident at Lahore found this position legally indefensible and practically untenable. He and his staff were there to superintend and aid the administration of the Sikh State and to look after the interests of the ruler, Mahārājā Duleep Singh, during the period of his minority. The Lahore Darbār and the Mahārājā had supported the Resident in all his efforts to deal with the situation in Multān and Hazārā. How could the latter justify the proclamation made by Lord Dalhousie? He suggested to the Governor-General to pursue his policies quietly and unobtrusively. The British armies were, therefore, marched upon the Punjab without an open declaration of war. Lord Hugh Gough, the Commander-in-Chief, left his headquarters at Simla towards the end of October and a huge army was assembled at Ferozepore in the beginning of November.

The Commander-in-Chief crossed the Sutlej on November 9, 1848, and reached Lahore on November 13. Three days later he marched towards the River Chenāb to join battle with Rājā Sher Singh. An action was fought at Rāmnagar on November 22. Lord Hugh Gough suffered a heavy reverse and lost a number of his officers, including Brigadier-General Cureton and Lieutenant-Colonel Havelock. The shock incapacitated him for further action for several weeks. The next battle took place on January 13, 1849, at Chelīānwālā on the Jhelum. Here Rājā Sher Singh's victory was even more decisive. British losses in killed and wounded amounted to over two thousand men and eighty-nine officers. "When the news of Chelīānwālā reached England," writes Adams, "the nation was stricken with

profound emotion. A long series of military successes had ill fitted it to hear with composure of British guns and British standards taken, of British Cavalry flying before the enemy. . . ." England's leading newspaper, *The Times*, criticized the leadership of Lord Hugh Gough, and John Hobhouse, President of the Board of Directors, decided to send Sir Charles Napier to supersede him. The eighty-year-old Duke of Wellington offered to come out to India to fight against the Sikhs.

Lord Gough, however, repaired his reputation in the battle of Gujrāt (February 21, 1849), in which Chattar Singh and Sher Singh were finally defeated. On March 14, the Sikh soldiers surrendered at Rāwalpindī. "Today is Ranjīt Singh dead," sighed the soldiers, as they kissed their swords and laid them down on the ever-enlarging heap of steel. Their half-choked words summed up the anguish of their hearts.

Lord Dalhousie proclaimed annexation of the Punjab on March 29, 1849. His Foreign Secretary, Henry M. Elliot, arrived at Lahore to obtain the signatures of the members of the Council of Regency and of the minor King, Mahārājā Duleep Singh. A *darbār* was held in the palace inside the Fort, and, with the British troops lined up on his right and his helpless *sardārs* on his left, the young Duleep Singh affixed his signatures to the fatal document which deprived him of his crown and kingdom.

John Sullivan in his *Are We Bound by Our Treaties* makes an unreserved and significant comment on the whole transaction. He says:

> This is perhaps the first instance on record in which a guardian has visited his own misdeeds upon his ward. The British Government was the self-constituted guardian of the Rajah [Mahārāja Duleep Singh], and the regent of his kingdom; a rebellion was provoked by the agents of the guardian, it was acknowledged by the guardian to be a rebellion against the government of his ward, and the guardian punished that ward by confiscating his dominions and his diamonds to his own use!

CHAPTER XVII

RECLAMATION

The Sikhs were deeply galled at the fall of their kingdom, but not unduly dismayed. They attributed the outcome of their contest with the English to the chances of war. They were also aware that, despite the deceitfulness of courtiers such as Lāl Singh and Tej Singh, they had fought the *ferringhī* squarely, and maintained their manly demeanour even in defeat. In this mood, it was easier for them to be reconciled to their lot after normalcy was restored. The peaceful spell which followed, however, produced an attitude of unwariness. Conventional and superstitious ritual which, forbidden by the Gurus, had become acceptable as an adjunct of regal pomp and ceremony during the days of Sikh power, gained an increasing hold over the Sikh mind. The true teachings of the Gurus which had supplied Sikhism its potent principle of reform and regeneration were obscured by this rising tide of conservatism. The Sikh religion was losing its characteristic vigour and its votaries were relapsing into beliefs and dogmas from which the Gurus' teaching had extricated them. Absorption into ceremonial Hinduism seemed the course inevitably set for them.

Two factors reclaimed the Sikhs from this fate—their adherence to the outward marks of their faith, especially the *kesas*, and a series of protestant currents which arose among them to purify the prevalent religious usage and rekindle the Sikh spirit. The first of these movements, known by the name of Nirankārī, originated during the Sikh period. Its founder, Bābā Dyāl (1783-1855), was a contemporary of Ranjīt Singh. A man of humble origin, he cavilled at the shortcomings of the mighty and assailed the rites and observances which had perverted the Sikh way of life. His main target was the worship of images against which

he preached vigorously. He re-emphasized the Sikh belief in Nirankār—the Formless One. From this, the movement he started came to be known as the Nirankārī movement.

Bābā Dyāl's influence was confined to the north-western districts of the Punjab. In 1851, he founded at Rāwalpindī the Nirankārī Darbār and gave this body the form of a sect. On his death, four years later, he was succeeded in the leadership of the community by his son, Bābā Darbārā Singh. The latter continued to propagate his father's teachings, prohibiting idolatrous worship, the use of alcohol and extravagant expenditure on weddings. He introduced in the Rāwalpindī area the *ānand* form of marrying rite. *Ānand*, an austerely simple and inexpensive ceremony, became a cardinal point with leaders of subsequent Sikh reformation movements.

What an unambiguous, crucial development the Nirankārī movement was in Sikh life will be borne out by this excerpt from the annual report of the Ludhiānā Christian Mission for 1853:

> Sometime in the summer we heard of a movement . . . which from the representations we received, seemed to indicate a state of mind favourable to the reception of Truth. It was deemed expedient to visit them, to ascertain the true nature of the movement and, if possible, to give it a proper direction. On investigation, however, it was found that the whole movement was the result of the efforts of an individual to establish a new *panth* (religious sect) of which he should be the instructor. . . . They professedly reject idolatry, and all reverence and respect for whatever is held sacred by Sikhs or Hindus, except Nanak and his Granth. . . . They are called Nirankaris, from their belief in God, as a spirit without bodily form. The next great fundamental principle of their religion is that salvation is to be obtained by meditation on God. They regard Nanak as their saviour, inasmuch as he taught them the way of salvation. Of their peculiar practices only two things are learned. First, they assemble every morning for worship, which consists of bowing the head to the ground before the Granth, making offerings and in hearing the Granth read by one of their numbers, and explained also if their leader be present. Secondly, they do not burn their dead, because that would assimilate them to the Hindus; nor bury them, because that would make them too much like Christians and Musalmans, but throw them into the river.

In its emphasis on the primacy of the Guru Granth in the

Sikh system and on self-identity, the Nirankārī movement foreshadowed the principal concerns of the Singh Sabhā reformation. This comment of the Ludhiānā missionaries barely four years after the lapse of Sikh sovereignty falsifies the hastily advanced view that the new sense of self-consciousness among the Sikhs was the creation of British policy.

Like the Nirankārī, the second reform movement known as the Nāmdhārī, or Kūkā, movement also had its origin in the north-west corner of the Sikh kingdom, away from the places of royal pomp and grandeur. It harked back to a way of life more in keeping with the spiritual tradition of the community. Its principal object was to spread the true spirit of Sikhism shorn of tawdry customs and mannerism, which had been growing on it since the beginning of Sikh monarchy. In the midst of national pride born of military glory and political power, this movement extolled the religious obligation for a pious and simple living.

The founder, Bhāī Bālak Singh (1799-1862) of Hazro, was a holy man whose noble example and sweet persuasive manner won him a number of followers. The most prominent among them was Bābā Rām Singh who undertook the direction of the movement after Bhāī Bālak Singh, giving it a more positive orientation.

Bābā Rām Singh, born at Bhainī, in Ludhiānā district, in 1816, was a soldier in the Sikh army. With his regiment he once happened to visit Hazro where he fell under the influence of Bhāī Bālak Singh. He became his disciple and dedicated himself to his mission. For his religious pursuits he had ample time in the army which, towards the end of Ranjīt Singh's days, was comparatively free from its more arduous tasks. In the 1845 Anglo-Sikh war, Bābā Rām Singh fought against the English at Mudkī.

He gave up service after the occupation of Lahore and returned to his village, Bhainī, which became another important centre of the Nāmdhārī faith. Upon Bābā Bālak Singh's death, in 1862, the chief responsibility passed on to Bābā Rām Singh, whose growing influence helped in the extension of the movement in central and eastern Punjab. An elaborate agency for missionary work was set up. The name of the head in a district—Sūbā, meaning governor,—had a significant, though remote, political implication. There were altogether

twenty-two such Sūbās, besides two Jathedārs, or group leaders, for each *tahsīl* and a Granthī, Scripture-reader or priest, for each village.

In the government papers of that period, Bābā Rām Singh's mission is described thus:

> He abolishes all distinctions of caste among Sikhs; advocates indiscriminate marriage of all classes; enjoins the marriage of widows; enjoins abstinence from liquor and drugs . . . exhorts his disciples to be cleanly and truth-telling. One of his maxims says: it is well that every man carries his staff, and they all do.

To the points mentioned could be added a few more such as reverence for the cow, simpler wedding ceremonies and abolition of infanticide which received equal emphasis. Bābā Rām Singh was never reconciled to the rule of the British. His prediction about its early recession was implicitly believed by his followers, who were forbidden to join government service, to go to courts of law or learn the English language. The movement thus acquired a strong political bias. Its chief inspiration was, in fact, derived from opposition to the foreign rule and everything tending to remind one of it was shunned. English education, mill-made cloth and other imported goods were boycotted. In its advocacy of the use of the Swadeshī, the Kūkā movement forestalled, in the sixties of the last century, an important feature of the nationalist struggle under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.

Kūkās even avoided use of the post offices established by the British and depended upon their own system of postal communication. Messages from their leader were conveyed with special despatch and alacrity. A fast-riding follower would carry the letter to the next village where another devotee, setting all other work aside, would at once speed on with it. People left off their meals unfinished to reach forward a message.

A spirit of fanatical national fervour and religious enthusiasm grew among the Kūkās and the personality of Bābā Rām Singh became the focal point of a close and well-organized order. The prospect was not looked upon with equanimity by the government, who, after the incidents of 1857, had become extra watchful. When, in 1863, Bābā Rām Singh wanted to go

to Amritsar for Baisākhī celebrations to which he had invited his followers from all over the Punjab, the civil authority became alarmed. The Lieutenant-Governor charged the Deputy Inspector-General of Police and the Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar to ascertain the real intentions of Bābā Rām Singh and his companions. The officials were not in favour of imposing any restrictions, especially on the occasion of a religious fair. But two months later, when Kūkās announced a meeting to be held at Khote, a village in Ferozepore district, prohibitory orders were issued banning all Kūkā meetings.

The Kūkā organization was subjected to strict secret vigilance, and intelligence officers in the districts sent in alarming reports about its aims and activities. It was bruited about that Bābā Rām Singh was raising an army to fight the English. Bhainī and Hazro were kept under constant watch, and, by order of the Punjab government, Bābā Rām Singh was detained in his village. The Kūkā congregations were stopped all over the Punjab.

These measures seemed to succeed for a while in restraining Kūkā activity. But a legend grew around Bhainī and the captive Bābā Rām Singh because of the distance placed between them and their devotees, creating in the minds of the faithful strangely romantic and miraculous visions. Some of them gave vent to their enthusiasm by demolishing graves and tombs which they had been forbidden to worship or honour. Incidents took place in various parts of the Punjab and a number of Kūkās were taken into custody.

Early in 1867, Bābā Rām Singh's request to be allowed to visit Muktsar on the sacred day of Māghī was refused by the government. His alternative request was for permission to hold a fair in his own village on the occasion of Holī. Major Perkins, the Superintendent of Police at Ludhiānā, was willing to allow, but the Inspector-General wanted to restrict the number of those who might visit Bhainī on that day. Meanwhile, Bābā Rām Singh decided to celebrate the festival at Anandpur Sāhib where Sikhs gathered for this purpose from all over the Punjab. The Lieutenant-Governor gave him the permission, but high-ranking police and civil officers were appointed to watch over the movements of the pilgrims.

Bābā Rām Singh set out in great state. He was accompanied

by twenty-one of his Sūbās on horseback and by more than two thousand of his followers on foot, with a large number of drums and banners. The visit went off peacefully, and the government were led to shedding much of their suspicion. All restrictions upon Bābā Rām Singh's freedom were withdrawn.

But the truce did not last long. The government showed excessive concern whenever Kūkās assembled to convene a *dīvān* or religious meeting. The report that a *lambardār* of a village in Ferozepore had turned a Kūkā, burning away in his fresh zeal his plough, bullock-cart, a bedstead and the spinning-wheel. alarmed the district authorities who saw in such accretions the signs of the growing influence of the new movement. More than forty Kūkās trying to hold a *dīvān* at Tharājwālā, in Ferozepore district, were arrested and seven of them were sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment by the Deputy Commissioner.

The government found further grounds of suspicion in the Kūkās' joining the armies of the Indian princes. It was feared that the object of such recruits was to get military training and then return to the Punjab to raise a tumult against the British. Since the Kūkās were averse to seeking service with the English, some of them had visited Mahārājā Ranbīr Singh of Kashmir in 1869 and offered to join the state forces. The Mahārājā agreed to recruit a new regiment and enlisted about 150 Kūkās. But the force was disbanded two years later under pressure of the British government.

In the early seventies of the last century, events moved at a catastrophic pace bringing the career of the Kūkā revolution to a dramatic climax.

The Kūkās, who had a deep sentiment for the cow, strongly resented the opening of beef shops in the sacred city of Amritsar. After the Ango-Sikh war of 1845-46, Henry Lawrence, the British Resident in the Punjab, had issued the following notice:

> The priests of Amritsar having complained of annoyances, this is to make known to all concerned that, by order of the Governor-General, British subjects are forbidden to enter the temple (called the Darbār) or its precincts, at Amritsar, or indeed any temple, with their shoes on. Kine are not to be killed at Amritsar, nor

are the Seikhs to be molested or in any way to be interfered with. Shoes are to be taken off at the Bhoonga at the corner of the tank and no person is to walk round the tank with his shoes on.

HENRY M. LAWRENCE
Resident

Lahore:
March 24th, 1847

These orders were strictly observed, but, after Punjab's annexation in 1849, the restrictions were disregarded and butchers' shops gradually opened in Amritsar, outside the Lahorī Gate. This caused a great deal of agitation, especially among the Kūkās. On the night of June 14, 1870, a fiery band of them attacked the butchers, killing four and injuring another three. A similar incident took place at Rāikot, in Ludhiānā district, where three persons were killed. For the incident at Amritsar, four Kūkās were awarded death sentence and two were transported for life. Five, including Giānī Ratan Singh, an influential Kūkā scholar, paid the extreme penalty of law for killing the butchers at Rāikot.

The Kūkās felt greatly incensed over these executions, especially that of Giānī Ratan Singh who had been wrongly implicated in the Rāikot murders. They became defiant and some of them openly preached revenge. The government was vigilant and the Commissioner of Ambālā prepared a report charging the Kūkās with sedition and recommending severe official measures against them including the deportation of their leader, Bābā Rām Singh.

Towards the end of 1871, the Punjab Government placed a ban on the Kūkās' assembling for any festival or fair outside Bhainī. Bābā Rām Singh, who was refused permission to go to Muktsar for the Māghī fair, issued messages to his followers to come to Bhainī for celebrating the festival. Kūkās were in a state of great excitement, and the atmosphere at Bhainī was tense. The storm that had been gathering burst. A batch of Kūkās, while returning from the fair, resolved to attack the state armoury at Mālerkotlā and loot the arms. On their way, they passed through Malaud. The Sikh chief of the village being away, they stopped to rob his house and equip themselves

with arms and horses. They met with opposition from his servants and other villagers, but managed to get away with four horses and a double-barrelled rifle. Two of the villagers and two Kūkās lost their lives in this encounter.

On the morning of January 15, 1872, Kūkās, numbering more than a hundred, reached Mālerkotlā and suddenly made an attack upon the treasury. A police party challenged them and, in the fracas that followed, eight policemen, including an officer, lost their lives. The Kūkās' loss amounted to seven killed.

The Deputy Commissioner of Ludhiānā district, Cowan, asked for military aid and Lord Napier of Magdala, the Commander-in-Chief, at once ordered two companies of 54th Regiment from Jullundur and a battery of Royal Artillery to proceed to Ludhiānā. The Deputy Commissioner also sent messages to the Sikh rulers of Patiālā, Nābhā and Jīnd to send troops.

Meanwhile, the party of Kūkās had been arrested by an officer of Patiālā state, Mīr Niāz Alī, rewarded for his services with a promotion as Nāzim, a *khill'at* worth Rs 1,000 and a sword of honour. Sixty-eight of the Kūkās, including two women, were presented before Cowan at Mālerkotlā. He made over the women prisoners to the commander of the Patiālā troops and ordered the rest to be immediately executed. In his enthusiasm to punish them, he transgressed his powers and did not wait for the formality of a trial. In fact, he had already written to the Commissioner of Ambālā division: "I am in hourly expectation of the arrival of the prisoners from Rur. I propose to execute at once all who were engaged in the attack on Malaud and Kotla. I am sensible of the great responsibility I incur in exercising an authority which is not vested in me, but the case is an exceptional one."

The Commissioner, T.D. Forsyth, was in favour of a trial and wrote to Cowan to leave temporarily "all men caught by Patiala authorities in their charge." The latter, however, ignored the direction. Guns were mounted in the Mālerkotlā parade ground on the afternoon of January 17, and fifty Kūkās were made over to the soldiers to be executed. As the prisoners were being brought forward batch by batch to be blown off the guns, a Kūkā breaking loose from the guard made a

dash for Cowan and held him by the neck. He was a strong man physically and it was with some difficulty that Cowan was extricated from his grip. The Kūkā was hacked to pieces on the spot.

As the last batch was being led out, Cowan received another communication from the Commissioner who had again suggested: "But with reference to your expressed desire for promptitude, the case is not sufficiently urgent to justify the abandonment of the very simple form of procedure we have at hand." This did not alter the fate of the remaining Kūkās, who, like those who had gone before, were torn to shreds by fiery powder.

Forsyth, who reached Mālerkotlā the following day, agreed with Cowan's findings in respect of the remaining sixteen prisoners and confirmed the death sentence passed by his deputy. Those sixteen were also blown away at gunmouth. Bābā Rām Singh was exiled from the Punjab, along with ten of his Sūbās, by order of Forsyth, and taken to Allahabad. The Kūkā headquarters at Bhainī passed into police control. A police post continued there till as late as 1921.

The Viceroy, Earl of Mayo, did not appreciate the precipitate action of Forsyth and Cowan. He ordered an enquiry as a result of which Cowan was dismissed from service and Forsyth was removed from his Ambālā post.

From Allahabad, Bābā Rām Singh was taken to Rangoon where he was detained under the Bengal Act of 1818. He lived in the same place where the last Mughal emperor had been kept, similarly charged.

For thirteen weary years, Bābā Ram Singh suffered confinement. His deep faith in the Almighty and the undiminished devotion of his followers sustained him in that solitary state. Every now and then some bold spirits, braving many a hazard, succeeded in circumventing the guards and seeing their leader, even though for a short while. A regular system of correspondence was maintained in this manner. Many of Bābā Rām Singh's letters have been preserved and a representative selection was published by Dr Gandā Singh a few years ago. The letters reveal Bābā Rām Singh's undying faith, his strength of character and his love for his followers. An occasional note of loneliness appears in these letters, though his spirit of patient

fortitude always proved stronger.

Bābā Rām Singh passed away on November 29, 1885. But many of his followers did not believe that he was dead. They continued to hope that he would one day come to the Punjab and free India from the shackles of the English.

The Kūkā movement marked a significant stage in the development of national consciousness in the country. In the seventies of the last century, when the English were reinstalling themselves in India after the revolt of 1857, it gave them another rude jolt.

Like the Nirankārīs. Nāmdhārīs also formed themselves into a separate sect. Today, they form a distinctly cohesive group among the Sikhs. Two things immediately mark them off from the latter—the style of their headgear and their adherence to the personality of their leader, Bābā Jagjīt Singh. Apparelled in immaculate, white homespun, they wind round their heads mull or longcloth without any semblance or embellishment and without giving it any sharp, emphatic lines.

While chanting the sacred hymns, they work themselves up to such ecstatic frenzy that they begin dancing and shouting. From these shouts and shrieks—*kūk*, in Punjabi—some humorously inclined youth in a Ludhiānā village called them Kūkās, little knowing that they were conferring upon the newly developing order a name which would be widely accepted and which would outlive the more carefully chosen appellations adopted by its authors.

The Kūkā outbreak was followed by a secret campaign for the restoration of Mahārājā Duleep Singh. The Punjab was in the 1880s astir with rumour. Anticipation filled the air. Reports were studiously kept in circulation that Duleep Singh would lead a Russian invasion into India and overthrow the British. A network of secret communication was laid out. Duleep Singh's emissaries kept infiltrating into India in spite of government vigilance. His statements and proclamations—as from "the Sovereign of the Sikh nation and Implacable Foe of the British Government"—were smuggled into the country for distribution.

Prophecies attributed to Guru Gobind Singh himself were cited in Duleep Singh's favour. In crisp, aphoristic Punjabi they announced: "He [Duleep Singh] will drive his elephant

throughout the world . . . . Dissensions will arise at Calcutta and quarrels will be in every home. Nothing will be known for twelve years. Then will rise the Khālsā, whom the people of all four castes will admire alike . . . . Fighting will take place near Delhi . . . . When Delhi remains fifteen *kos* away, the King will cease, Duleep Singh will sit on the throne and all people will pay him homage."

There were desertions from Indian regiments, however sporadic and infrequent. Covert contacts were formed with individuals in foreign lands.

The brain behind this entire movement was Thākur Singh Sandhānwālīā. He had implanted the seeds of rebellion in the mind of Duleep Singh, living as a ranked British noble in England after being deprived of the throne of the Punjab. He had, finally, persuaded the Mahārājā to renounce Christianity and re-join the faith of his forefathers.[1] From Pondicherry, where he had taken asylum to escape British authority, he masterminded the operations in behalf of Duleep Singh. He maintained an active liaison with people in distant places through his chain of servants, dependants and relations. Pondicherry had become the seat of Duleep Singh's emigre government, with Thākur Singh Sandhānwāliā as Prime Minister.

The following proclamation—one of the several he issued—reflects the temper of Mahārājā Duleep Singh :

PARIS, 1886

Brother Princes and Nobles and the people of beloved Hindustan,

By the grace of Almighty God, the Creator of the

1. From England, Duleep Singh was coming to India in 1886 to undergo the ceremony of reinitiation, but was detained by the British at Aden. He, however, had his wish fulfilled and, on May 15, 1886, received the rites of Sikh baptism from the Five Elect—Thākur Singh of Wāgāh, another cousin of his (son of his mother's sister), Rūr Singh of village Kohālī, in Amritsar district, Jawand Singh of Barkī, in Lahore district, and two Sikhs picked for the ceremony from a transport ship which happened to touch at Aden. Before this formal conversion, Mahārājā Duleep Singh had written a letter to one of his relatives in the Punjab which is quoted below:

Universe, the most merciful and gracious, and of Sri Govind Singhji,

We, Maharaja Duleep Singh, the lawful sovereign of the Sikh Nation, have set aside and annulled that treaty of annexation of the Punjab, which, to the disgrace of Great Britain, be it said, was extorted from us and Darbar, when we were of tender age, and ward of Christian England under the treaty of Bhyrowal 1846 (in order to lay his wicked hands on our dominions) by the late Unscrupulous Marquis of Dalhousie.

But the moral (?) British nation is no respecter of "solemn covenants" and treaties when its own interests are at variance with the interests of the weaker contracting parties thereto; as most of you as well as ourselves know by experience.

* * * *

The Government of India out of spite may indeed put its veto upon the generous impulse of your hearts, but if you all unite, it will be powerless to harm you as you cannot all be deposed or sent to the Kala Panee for not paying any heed to the arbitrary behest of such a timorous administration as it has now become. For see, that notwithstanding all its boasted vast resources how it dreads the return to India of a Sikh who unlike you (Indian princely rulers) does not even possess a single soldier.

Therefore, be not cowards but be brave and worthy of your great forefathers.

DULEEP SINGH
The Lawful Sovereign of the Sikh Nation

Elveden Hall
Thetford
Suffolk

My dear Sirdar Sant Singh,

I am very pleased to receive your letter. I thank you very much for offering me your kind services but there is nothing that I require. As the British Government refuse to do me justice, therefore, I shall leave England on the 16th of December next and take up my residence quietly at Delhi for I am poor now.

I am very pleased to find in you a relative of my dear late mother.

As you are aware by this time that I have rejoined the faith of my ancestors, I salute you with Wah Gooroo Jee dee Futteh and remain,

Your affectionate relative
DULEEP SINGH

October 7th, 1885

Thākur Singh Sandhānwāliā received correspondence from Duleep Singh through the French post office. Through the same medium he sent his letters to him and some of the Indian newspapers, especially *The Times of India* and *The Madras Times*. He was able to establish a fairly extensive system of communication in the Punjab. Among his trusted helpers were Bāwā Buddh Singh, an ex-captain of the Nepal army who lived in Thākur Singh's *havelī* in Amritsar, Partāp Singh Granthī, his own manager, Pohlo Mall, and Sohan Lāl of Dādrī, a servant of his mother-in-law, Rānī Kanwal Kaur of Ballabgarh. The Kūkā Sikhs were the most enthusiastic in pro-Duleep Singh activity.

Thākur Singh used to have a continuous stream of visitors in Pondicherry, including, occasionally, soldiers from the Indian army. He had links with Chandernagor, from where Shashī Bhūshan Mukerjī, editor of the *Beaver*, came to visit him. From Bengal came Tīn-cowrī Banerjī and Sarish Chander Bose, who jointly edited the *Projabandhu*.

Envoys came from Duleep Singh as well. The most important of them were Ghulām Rasūl, a wool merchant of Amritsar, who had lived for many years in the Sudan and in Egypt, and Rūr Singh of village Kohālī. The latter was described in government reports as a Europeanized Sikh. When gaoled by the British, his hospitality requirements ran to "some ice, brandy, claret and Vichy water."

Rūr Singh had been with Duleep Singh in Russia and brought from him secret missives, including a circular letter for the ex-king of Oudh and for the rulers of Barodā, Gwālīor, Patiālā, Nābhā, Farīdkot, Jīnd and Kapūrthalā. The princes generally implicated in the cause of Duleep Singh were Rājā Bikram Singh of Farīdkot, who was one of the leading figures in the Singh Sabhā renaissance, Rājā Hīrā Singh of Nābhā, the Mahārājā of Kashmir and Rājā Motī Singh of Poonch. According to a statement made at Hardwār to the government by Mangalān, who was a maidservant of Mahārānī Jind Kaur and who is described as Duleep Singh's foster mother, there was great "unity of purpose between the Rājā of Farīdkot, Rājā Amar Singh of Kashmir and Sardār Dyāl Singh Majīthīā" in their support for Duleep Singh.

From Russia, Duleep Singh sent to Thākur Singh a seal

and letter in token of his appointment to the office of Prime Minister:

> I appoint you my Prime Minister, should Sri Satguru Ji one day replace me on the throne of the Punjab.

But Thākur Singh suddenly fell ill and died on August 18, 1887. His ashes were taken to his ancestral village of Rājāsānsī by a servant, Jawālā Singh. His sons continued to live in Pondicherry and the eldest, Gurbachan Singh, was invested by Duleep Singh with the title of Prime Minister. But returning from Russia to Paris, Duleep Singh had a stroke and remained bedridden for three years, the passion and grand designs of former day pathetically congealed in his heart. Drained financially and destitute of friends, he died in his humble hotel room in Paris on October 22, 1893. Thus was completed a life cycle drawn, as it were, to stated requirements of the tragedian, the poet, the philosopher.

CHAPTER XVIII

REORIENTATION I

Because of their rather restricted scope and because of the schismatic character they acquired, both Nirankārī and Nāmdhārī movements had failed to stir the Sikh people as a whole. The Singh Sabhā which followed them had a deeper impact. It influenced the entire community and reoriented its outlook and spirit. Since the days of the Gurus nothing so vital had transpired to fertilize the consciousness of the Sikhs. The Singh Sabhā by leavening the intellectual and cultural processes brought a new dimension to the inner life of the community and enlarged its heritage. Starting in the seventies of the last century, it marked a turning point in Sikh history. It touched Sikhism to its very roots, and made it a living force once again. The stimulus it provided has shaped the Sikhs' attitude and aspiration over the past one hundred years.

The main motivation of the Singh Sabhā was search for Sikh identity and self-assertion. The entire period can be interpreted and understood in terms of this central concern. Under this Singh Sabhā impulse, new powers of regeneration came into effect and Sikhism was reclaimed from a state of utter ossification and inertia. Its moral force and dynamic vitality were rediscovered. The Sikh mind was stirred by a process of liberation and it began to look upon its history and tradition with a clear, self-discerning eye. What had become effete and decrepit and what was reckoned to be against the Gurus' teachings was rejected. The purity of Sikh precept and practice was sought to be restored. Rites and customs considered consistent with Sikh doctrine and tradition were established. For some, legal sanction was secured through government legislation.

With the reform of Sikh ceremonial and observances came the reformation of Sikh shrines which, again, was clinched by an impressive demonstration of communal mobilization and by eventual legislative sanction secured from the government of the day. This period of fecundation of the spirit and of modern development also witnessed the emergence of new cultural and political aspirations. Literary and educational processes were renovated. Through a strong political platform, the Sikhs sought to secure recognition for themselves.

> An English newspaper writes that the Christian faith is making rapid progress and makes the prophecy that within the next twenty-five years, one-third of the Mājhā area will be Christian. The Mālwā will follow suit. Just as we do not see any Buddhists in the country except in images, in the same fashion the Sikhs, who are now, here and there, visible in turbans and their other religious forms like wrist-bangles and swords, will be seen only in pictures in museums. Their own sons and grandsons turning Christians and clad in coats and trousers and sporting toadstool-like caps will go to see them in the museums and say in their pidgin Punjabi: 'Look, that is the picture of a Sikh—the tribe that inhabited this country once upon a time.' Efforts of those who wish to resist the onslaught of Christianity are feeble and will prove abortive like a leper without hands and feet trying to save a boy falling off a rooftop.

This was a note which appeared in a Sikh newspaper, the *Khālsā Akhbār* (Punjabi) of Lahore, May 25, 1894, from the pen of its editor, Giānī Ditt Singh (1853-1901).

Reporting the observance of the first anniversary of the Lahore Singh Sabhā in its issue for April 22, 1905, the *Khālsā Advocate* (English) referred to the occupant of a *bungā* in the precincts of the Tarn Tāran Gurdwārā who had embraced Christianity and hung a cross on one of its walls to convert it into a Christian chapel.

The *Khālsā Akhbār*, July 13, 1894, carried this letter in its correspondence columns:

> In the village of Nattā, Nābhā state, a Sikh married off his daughter according to Sikh custom. Most of the population in the village, including Brahmanical Hindus and some Sikhs, became hostile. They did not let the marriage party stay in the *dharamsālā*. The host, firm in his faith, had to put up the wedding guests in his own house.

A student by the name of Bīr Singh contributed a letter to the *Khālsā Akhbār*, February 12, 1897, saying:

> Near the Dukhbhanjanī *berī* tree [in the Golden Temple precincts] there is a room on the front wall of which is painted a picture. The picture depicts a goddess and Guru Gobind Singh. The goddess stands on golden sandals and she has many hands—ten or, perhaps, twenty. One of the hands is stretched out and in this she holds a *khandā*. Guru Gobind Singh stands barefoot in front of it with his hands folded.

A letter in the *Khālsā Akhbār*, October 8, 1897, reported:

> On Tuesday, Bhādon 31, the *pujārīs* of the Tarn Tāran Gurdwārā held the *shrādha* ceremony in honour of Guru Arjun. Those feasted were from outside the faith and they smoked.

A correspondent's letter in the *Khālsā Samāchār* of Amritsar, edited by Bhāī Vīr Singh, June 25, 1902, said :

> Around the village of Singhpur, Christians and Muhammadans are becoming very influential. The former have two churches here and the latter two mosques. In this area there is no *dharamsāḷā* and the rural Khālsā is rather neglectful of its religious duty.

These quotations from contemporary Sikh newspapers reveal the nature of the identity crisis Sikhism then faced. They refer to some of the fundamental deficiencies of Sikh society and the challenges a fast-changing environment had created. Audible here are also the intimations of the Singh Sabhā awakening, then moving the hearts of large numbers of Sikhs in the Punjab and outside.

An editorial in the *Khālsā Advocate* (English), December 15, 1904, summed up the situation which existed before the emergence of the Singh Sabhā thus:

> ...false gurus grew up in great abundance whose only business was to fleece their flock and pamper their own self-aggrandizement. Properly speaking, there was no Sikhism. Belief in the Gurus was gone. The idea of brotherhood in the Panth was discarded. The title of 'Bhai,' so much honoured by Sikhs of old, fell into disuse and contempt. Sikhs grovelled in superstition and idolatry. . . It [Sikhism] had thus lost all that was good and life-giving in the faith.

From what decadent state the Singh Sabhā had salvaged Sikhism will be apparent from this following single instance. Before the movement had got well under way, the powerful Singh Sabhā editor, Giānī Ditt Singh, who met the raging polemics against the Sikhs with extraordinary literary and scholarly readiness and who was one of the leading lights of the reformation, had to withdraw himself from the Sikh congregation at the time of the distribution of *karāhprāsād*. The reason was that he came of a so-called low-caste family.

The decline had started in the very heyday of Sikh power. In the courtly splendour of the days of Mahārājā Ranjīt Singh, Sikh practice had been utterly subverted. The faith was weakened by the influx of large numbers of those who had adopted the Sikh form to gain material advantage, but whose allegiance to its principles and traditions was only tentative. In the words of a character in one of Sir Jogendra Singh's English novels, *Rasīlī*: "We failed because we did not obey the Guru. People established kingdoms and principalities and neglected their poor brethren. The result is what you see—the Khālsā has fallen." But the protagonist is aware of the massive reformation that was taking place. He says, "Sikhism is now casting off external influences and returning to the solid rock of its own pure faith and divine teachings."

In a general way, the Singh Sabhā was an expression of the impulse of the Sikh community to rid itself of the base adulterations and accretions which were draining away its energy and to rediscover the sources of its original inspiration. Unlike other Indian reform movements of the period which were the creation of the elite, the Singh Sabhā was a mass upsurge. Besides the awareness that Sikhism as commonly practised was a corruption of what it originally was, two other motivating factors were at work : a reaction to what was happening in the neighbourly religious traditions and defensiveness generated by Christian proselytization and the *odium theologicum* started by Hindu critics.

The Christian missionary activity had started in the Punjab with the influx of the English. Even while Ranjīt Singh, the Sikh sovereign, reigned in Lahore, an American Presbyterian mission had been set up at Ludhiānā, the north-western British outpost near the Sikh frontier. The factors for the choice of

this area as "the best field of labour" were its "numerous and hardy population . . . a better climate than the lower provinces and . . . a ready access to the lower ranges of the Himalaya mountains in case of the failure of health." Another reason was the Sikh population "to whom our attention at first was specially directed," as says John C. Lowrie in his book *Travels in North India*.

With the abrogation of Sikh rule in 1849, the Ludhiānā Mission extended its work to Lahore. Two of its members, C.W. Forman and John Newton, were set apart for this duty and sent to the Punjab capital immediately. English and vernacular schools as well as welfare institutions like hospitals and orphanages followed. C.W. Forman turned out regularly for bazar preaching. One day he received a challenge to a public debate with a Muslim theologian which he accepted. Six subjects were fixed for discussion and the issue joined with zeal from both sides. The event (1862) might well have been a precursor to disputations between spokesmen of different faiths which overtook the Punjab in the last decades of the century.

John Lawrence, who was one of the triumvirate which ruled the Punjab after it was annexed to Britain, was a zealous patron of Christian proselytization. He contributed towards the Mission funds a sum of Rs 500 annually out of his own pocket. Other English officers followed his example. It was his ambition to see the conquest of the Sikh dominions followed by large-scale conversions to Christianity.

Amritsar, headquarters of the Sikh faith, became another important seat of Church enterprise. In 1852, T.H. Fitzpatrick and Robert Clark, the first missionaries of the Church of England appointed to the Punjab, arrived in station. In the valedictory instructions given them, they had been told: "Though the Brahman religion still sways the minds of a large portion of the population of the Punjab, and the Mohammedan of another, the dominant religion and power for the last century has been the Sikh religion, a species of pure theism, formed in the first instance by a dissenting sect from Hinduism. A few helpful instances lead us to believe that the Sikhs may prove more accessible to scriptural truth than the Hindus and Mohammedans. . . ."

The English missionaries were joined by Daud Singh,

recorded to be the first Sikh ever to have embraced Christianity. He had been baptized in Kanpur by the Rev W.H. Perkins, and was transferred to Amritsar as pastor in 1852. The Mission houses were built in the city by the Deputy Commissioner. Construction of the station church was started. In the wake of the Mission came a vernacular school, a high school, a school for girls and a midwifery hospital. The evangelizing work was rewarded with the conversion of men like Shamaun, i.e. Simeon, a Sikh *granthī* (reader of the Holy Book or priest), formerly Kesar Singh of Sultānwind, Imād-ud-Dīn, a Muslim *maulavī* and Rulīā Rām, a Hindu Khatrī from Amritsar, who had attended the Mission School and passed the Calcutta entrance examination. Sub-stations of the Mission were opened in important towns of the Sikh tract of Mājhā such as Tarn Tāran, Ajnālā and Jandiālā.

The United Presbyterian Mission which began its work at Siālkot in 1855 met with special success. The conversion of Ditt, "a dark, lame, little man," of the sweeper class from Marālī village was the forerunner of what has been called "the mass movement." "In the eleventh year after Ditt's conversion more than five hundred *chūrās* (outcaste scavengers) were received into the Church. By 1900 more than half of these lowly people in Siālkot district had been converted, and by 1915 all but a few hundred members of the caste professed the Christian faith," reports J. Waskom Pickett in his book *The Mass Movement*.

Other societies, notably the Cambridge Mission, the Baptist Mission and the Church of Scotland, entered the field and the network soon covered the entire country, including the frontier areas. A catalyst had entered Punjabi life which precipitated a vital reaction.

The challenge of Western science and Christian ethics and humanitarianism provoked self-examination and reinterpretation in Indian religions. The result was a vast movement of reformation which took pronouncedly sectarian forms in Ārya Samāj fundamentalism in Hinduism and Ahmadīyah heresy in Islam. The more liberal expressions were the Brahma Sabhā, later known as Brahmo Samāj, founded by Rājā Rāmmohun Roy (1772-1833) in Bengal in 1828, the Prārthanā Sabhā which began in Bombay in 1867 and the teachings of Rāmakrishna

Paramhansa (1834-86). The encounter in the Punjab was marked by aggressiveness and acerbity and the last decades of the nineteenth century were filled with abrasive religious polemic in which Christians, Muslims and Ārya Samājists all freely participated.

For Sikhism, strangely somnolent since the forfeiture of political authority, this was a critical time. Challenged by the religious and cultural forces around it, it was set on a course of self-understanding. The formalism and ceremonial which had accumulated during the days of princely power were recognized as accretions and adulterations contrary to the teachings of the Gurus. Survival was linked with expunction of these abuses and the recovery of purity in belief and usage. Such had been the dereliction of the faith that, after the occupation of the Punjab, several of the British observers prognosticated dismally for it. Some thought it was already dead; others that it was due for extinction. The following excerpt from the Punjab Administration Report for 1851-52 is worth quoting:

> The Sikh faith and ecclesiastical polity is rapidly going where the Sikh political ascendancy has already gone. Of the two elements in the old Khalsa, namely, the followers of Nanuck, the first prophet, and the followers of Guru Govind Singh, the second great religious leader, the former will hold their ground, and the latter will lose it. The Sikhs of Nanuck, a comparatively small body of peaceful habits and old family, will perhaps cling to the faith of their fathers; but the Sikhs of Govind [Singh] who are of more recent origin, who are more specially styled the Singhs or "lions," and who embraced the faith as being the religion of warfare and conquest, no longer regard the Khalsa now that the prestige has departed from it.
>
> These men joined in thousands, and they now desert in equal numbers. They rejoin the ranks of Hinduism whence they originally came, and they bring up their children as Hindus. The sacred tank at Umritsur is less thronged than formerly, and the attendance at the annual festivals is diminishing yearly. The initiatory ceremony for adult persons is now rarely performed.

The fall in numbers supported the dismsal predictions about the final eclipse of the Sikh faith. A demographical detail was worked out by the British in 1855 in respect of the Lahore division. There were found only about two lakh Sikhs to an aggregate population of about three million. These figure

related to the Mājhā region, known as the central home of the Sikhs. The following comment on this point is from the Punjab Administration Report for 1855-56:

> This circumstance strongly corroborates what is commonly believed, namely that the Sikh tribe is losing its number rapidly. Modern Sikhism was little more than a political association (formed exclusively from among Hindus), which men would join or quit according to the circumstances of the day. A person is not born a Sikh, as he might be born a Muhammadan or born a Hindu; but he must be specially initiated into Sikhism. Now that the Sikh commonwealth is broken up, people cease to be initiated into Sikhism and revert to Hinduism. Such is the undoubted explanation of a statistical fact, which might otherwise appear to be hardly credible.

The Sikhs, roughly estimated to be about ten million in Ranjīt Singh's Punjab, dwindled to a mere 1,141,848 in the enumeration made in the Punjab in 1868. In the regular census of 1881, the Sikh figure stood at 1,716,114. This included the entire Punjab as well as the area covered by cis-Sutlej princely states.

In 1853, Mahārājā Duleep Singh, the last Sikh ruler of the Punjab, who had come under British tutelage at the tender age of eight, accepted the Christian faith—a conversion hailed as "the first instance of the accession of an Indian prince to the communication of the Church." Duleep Singh made liberal donations out of his allowance for Christian charity and the maintenance of mission schools. The Sikh ruler of Kapūrthalā invited the Ludhiānā Mission to set up a station in his capital and provided funds for its maintenance. To quote from the Annual Report of the Mission (1862), "Until the Rājāh of Kapūrthalā invited missionaries to his capital, no instance had occurred in India, in which the progress of the Gospel had been fostered by a ruler." A few years later, the Kapūrthalā prince's nephew, Kanwar Harnām Singh, became a Christian. The Gospel was preached in the neighbourhood of the Golden Temple. For this purpose one of the surrounding *bungās*, or pilgrims' inns, had been acquired on rent.

In the beginning of 1873, four Sikh pupils of the Amritsar Mission School—Āyā Singh, Attar Singh, Sādhū Singh and

Santokh Singh—proclaimed their intention of renouncing their faith in favour of Christianity. This shocked Sikh feeling. Added to this was a series of carping lectures in Amritsar on the Sikh faith and the narration of Guru Nānak's life in deliberately garbled detail by Shardhā Rām Phillaurī, who had been engaged by the British to write a history of the Sikhs. To consider these matters, some prominent Sikhs, including Thākur Singh Sandhānwālīā (1837-87), Bābā Sir Khem Singh Bedī (1832-1905), a descendant of Guru Nānak, Kanwar Bikramā Singh (1835-87) of Kapūrthalā and Giānī Giān Singh (1824-84) of Amritsar convened a meeting in Amritsar. Thākur Singh, a man of learning who possessed the rare accomplishment of having mastered the two classical languages of the East, Sanskrit and Arabic, had been a member of the Golden Temple management board appointed by the British before he turned a rebel. In this capacity he had seen how Sikh custom and ritual had become corrupted and felt concerned about the general state of the Sikh community and its resilement from its traditions. As a result of the deliberations of the Amritsar meeting over which he presided, an association called the Srī Guru Singh Sabhā came into being on October 1, 1873. The Singh Sabhā undertook to (i) restore Sikhism to its pristine purity; (ii) edit and publish historical and religious books; (iii) propagate current knowledge, using Punjabi as the medium, and to start magazines and newspapers in Punjabi; (iv) reform and bring back into the Sikh fold the apostates; (v) interest the highly placed Englishmen in, and ensure their association with, the educational programme of the Sikhs.

The Singh Sabhā proved the *elan vital* in the regeneration of Sikh society. It gained quick support of diverse sections of the community. Many Sikh scholars and leaders volunteered to join its ranks. A vigorous campaign was set afoot. Two of its major thrusts were the depreciation of un-Sikh customs and social evils and the encouragement of Western education. The progressive concern was as pronounced as the revivalist impulse. Initially, the supporters of the Singh Sabhā encountered severe opposition. They were scorned and ridiculed for what appeared to be their novel ideas. An epigrammatic couplet satirizing their new-fangled enthusiasm became part of Punjabi folklore:

> When the barn is emptied of grain,
> What better can you do than turn a Singh Sabhīā ?

More mordant in humour was the villagers' deliberate corruption of the name of the movement from Singh Sabhā to Singh Safā, the word *safā* signifying widespread destruction caused by the plague epidemic of 1902.

The Singh Sabhā ideology percolated to the Sikh peasantry primarily through soldiers serving in the army or those who had retired from the service. One of the regiments had constituted a choir of reciters to go round the villages and sing Sikh hymns in Singh Sabhā congregations. The old prejudices were gradually overcome and the Singh Sabhā crusade for enlightenment reached its culminating point in a huge Sikh convention held on June 14, 1903, at the village of Bakāpur, in Jullundur district. The occasion marked the conversion to Sikhism of Karīm Bakhsh, born a Muslim, and his family of four sons and a daughter. Some Hindus of that village as well as Sikhs from among the audience were also initiated on that day. The ceremony was marked by considerable fanfare. The sponsors were the Srī Guru Singh Sabhā, Bhasaur, which, under the leadership of Bābū Tejā Singh (1867-1933), then a sub-overseer in the Irrigation Department of Patiālā state, was very active in purifying Sikh ritual and re-establishing its autonomy.

The Bhasaur Singh Sabhā, located in a little village, in Patiālā state, was among the more energetic of the Singh Sabhās in those days. The dynamite came from the personality of its secretary, Bābū Tejā Singh. He possessed a fertile mind and was an untiring campaigner. By his stern resoluteness and limitless capacity for innovation, he brought to the Singh Sabhā renaissance a new verve and thrust. He was a puritan of the extremist kind, and a fundamentalist in the interpretation of Sikh principles and tradition. He challenged much of the prevalent Sikh usage.

The Singh Sabhā in the village of Bhasaur was established in 1893. This was twenty years after the first Singh Sabhā came into existence in Amritsar. Bhaī Basāwā Singh, known as a *virakt* or recluse, was the first president of the Bhasaur Singh Sabhā and Bābū Tejā Singh its first secretary. The Bhasaur Singh Sabhā was, from the very beginning, forthright in the

rejection of caste and Brahmanical customs which had infiltrated into Sikhism. It openly advocated the acceptance back into the Sikh fold of those who had been led into forsaking their faith. It went further and willingly converted members of other faiths who volunteered for initiation.

A Shuddhī Sabhā had been established by Dr Jai Singh in Lahore on April 17, 1893, with the object of "reclaiming those Sikhs and Hindus who had apostatized themselves by contracting alliances with Muslim men or women." The Bhasaur Singh Sabhā was critical of the limited objective of the Shuddhī Sabhā and questioned its very designation, which, it said, was only an imitation of Ārya Samāj vocabulary. From its very inception, it had accepted for conversion Muslims and those from lower Hindu castes. As the records say, at the first annual *dīvān* of the Bhasaur Singh Sabhā held in 1894, thirteen Jats, six *jhīvars* (water-carriers), two barbers, one Khatrī and one Musalman (Mīrān Bakhsh, of *tahsīl* Garhshankar, who became Nihāl Singh) were initiated into the Sikh faith. Bābū Tejā Singh himself published in the press a report of a subsequent year saying: "By the power of the Word revealed by the Ten Masters and in accord with Akālpurakh's wish, the Srī Guru Singh Sabhā, Bhasaur, has administered the Gurumantra and holy *amrit* to a Muslim woman and ushered her into Sodhbans [the family of Guru Gobind Singh]. Her Sikh name is Kishan Kaur. A Sikh who had fallen by living with a Muslim woman has been baptized and renamed Ude Singh."

Karīm Bakhsh was born of Muslim parents, Nathū and Basrī, at Bakāpur, in 1860. He was of a religious turn of mind. This disturbed his family, who, to detract him from his lonely ways, married him when he was barely twelve. At the age of 15 Karīm Bakhsh's quest for spiritual company took him to a Sikh saint, Bhāī Kāhlā Singh of Bangā at whose feet he spent two years. After Bhāī Kāhlā Singh's death, Karīm Bakhsh sought solace in the service of his disciple, Bhāī Dūlā Singh of Thākurwāl. For twelve years, he presented himself once every week in the holy *sangat* at Thākurwāl, thirty-two kilometres away from his village.

Karīm Bakhsh spent most of his time reciting *gurbānī* from memory. He used to welcome the Sikhs with the Khālsā greeting and made regular visits to Amritsar to bathe in the sacred

pool. He suffered ostracism and insult at the hands of his co-religionists. Gradually, his wife was also converted to his way of life and, as the report says, he established conjugal relations with her only after he was convinced of her faith in Sikhism.

The story of the Bakāpur family reached Bhasaur through Bhāī Takht Singh of Ferozepore, a pioneer of women's education among Sikhs. This was corroborated by some other members of the Singh Sabhā who supplied further details of Karīm Bakhsh's interest in Sikhism. The Bhasaur Sabhā decided to make its own investigations. Kāhlā Singh, who made a secret visit to Bakāpur, confirmed the story. This led the Sabhā to offer to convert the Bakāpur family at its annual *dīvān* of 1901, but it had to give up the plan owing to the outbreak of plague in the country. In 1902, Maulavī Karīm Bakhsh attended the large annual *dīvān* of the Sikhs at Bhasaur, but returned empty-handed owing to a controversy that had arisen among them.

The Bhasaur Singh Sabhā sent its emissaries—Bhāī Tejā Singh of Maingan, Sardār Bishan Singh and Bhāī Takht Singh —to visit Bakāpur by turns and assure Karīm Bakhsh that his heart's wish must be fulfilled. Finally, Bābū Tejā Singh went himself. At Bakāpur, he learnt that Maulavī Karīm Bakhsh's wife had passed away less than a week earlier and that the last rites had been performed strictly in accordance with the Sikh injunctions. There was the Guru Granth kept with true reverence in a room in the house and the Sikh *kīrtan* was performed daily.

On return, Bābū Tejā Singh issued a public notice signifying that a big *dīvān* of the Khālsā would be convened in the village of Bakāpur on June 13-14, 1903. The letter was sent on behalf of the Bhasaur Singh Sabhā to all the leading Sikh societies and individuals inviting them to participate in the proceedings. The letter included a note on the Bakāpur family and its zeal for the Sikh faith.

The invitation widely circulated evoked a ready response. On the appointed day, batches of Sikhs converged on Bakāpur from places such as Lahore, Amritsar, Gujrānwālā, Gujjarkhān, Katānī, Nārangwāl and Ludhiānā. An elderly uncle of Sardār Sundar Singh Majīthīā, Bābā Hīrā Singh, led a *jathā* from the Amritsar Khālsā College. The group included Bhāī Jodh Singh

(distinguished Sikh theologian and educationist of modern times), who was then a student of the final B.A. class, Tārā Singh, who had just joined college and who later became famous as a political leader, and Mān Singh, who rose to be the president of the Judicial Committee in Farīdkot state.

On the morning of the opening day of the proceedings, Maulavī Karīm Bakhsh rose at 2 in the morning, performed his ablutions and came to the site of the *dīvān*. He sat in a room rapt in meditation. The Āsā-dī-Vār was sung after which different *jathās* took turns at *kīrtan*. They included the Singh Sabhā of Gujjarwāl, Sardār Basant Singh and Munshī Anūp Singh of Nārangwāl and the Youth League of Ludhiānā. For a while, a group of women also led the *kīrtan*. Chanting of the sacred *sabads* went on until it was time for Guru-kā-Langar or community meal. The afternoon *dīvān* was addressed by Bābū Tejā Singh, who explained the purpose of the convention and sought from the audience names of those who would wish to be baptized. First to volunteer was Basant Singh, a former Panjab University student, of the village of Nārangwāl, in Ludhiānā district, who, after initiation, was named Randhīr Singh and who became known as a revolutionary and, later, as a saintly personage of much sanctity among the Sikhs.

To conduct the initiation ceremonies the following day, the five Piāre designated were Bhāī Tejā Singh of Rāwalpindī, Takht Singh, *Zindā Shahīd* (Living Martyr), of Ferozepore, Bhāī Basant Singh of Bappiānā (Patiālā state), Bhāī Sohan Singh of Gujjarkhān and Bhāī Amar Singh of Rājā Ghumān. Bhāī Jodh Singh was named *granthī* for the ceremonies.

In all, thirty-five persons received the Sikh baptism the following morning (June 14). Maulavī Karīm Bakhsh, 43, was named Lakhbīr Singh after initiation. His four sons Rukan Dīn, 15, Fateh Dīn, 12, Ghulām Muhammad, 6, and Khair Dīn, 4, became Matāb Singh, Kirpāl Singh, Harnām Singh and Gurbakhsh Singh, respectively. His daughter Bībī Nūrān, 9, was given the Sikh name of Waryām Kaur. Lakhbīr Singh won wide esteem in the Sikh community as Sant (saint) Lakhbīr Singh. He migrated to Amritsar, where his daily routine began with a visit to the Golden Temple. He would reach there soon after midnight, before the doors of the Harimandir were opened, and recite the *Sukhmanī* while circumambulating the shrine. His

holiness was commonly acknowledged and he counted among his admirers men like Bhāī Vīr Singh and Sardār Sundar Singh Majīthīā (1872-1941). His son, Matāb Singh, founded a society called Khālsā Barādarī and played a pioneer role in the campaign for the reformation of the Sikh sacred places. Matāb Singh's son, Gurcharan Singh Sākhī, took his Bachelor's degree at the Khālsā College at Amritsar, and edited, among others, a Sikh religious journal until he died suddenly in the Golden Temple ambulatory in 1973.

The Bakāpur *dīvān* marked a high point in the Singh Sabhā resurgence. It was a visible expression of the new urges which moved the Sikh community at that time. A sweeping religious fervour, a new sense of identity and unity and a decisive breach with the recent past dominated by customs and practices which had no sanction in the tradition were the characteristics of contemporary Sikhism. These were dramatically highlighted at Bakāpur.

Singh Sabhās were now springing up in all parts of the Punjab, those at Amritsar, Lahore, Rāwalpindī, Jullundur, Ludhiānā, Ferozepore, Patiālā, Nābhā, Farīdkot, Bāgrīān, Bhasaur, Kapūrthalā and Simla being notably active. To coordinate the work of the Amritsar Singh Sabhā and the Lahore Singh Sabhā, established by Bhāī Gurmukh Singh in 1877, a joint board called the General Sabhā was formed. The General Sabhā was subsequently replaced by the Khālsā Dīwān which was set up at Amritsar in 1883. The Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab and Rājā Bikram Singh of Farīdkot were its patrons. Bābā Khem Singh was made president and Bhāī Gurmukh Singh chief secretary. This Khālsā Dīwân became the affiliating centre for all the Singh Sabhās. But owing to the differences between Amritsar Singh Sabhā and Lahore Singh Sabhā brought to a head by the style in which the Amritsar leader, Bābā Khem Singh, was apotheosized by his followers, a schism occurred. Bhāī Gurmukh Singh and his colleagues established a separate Khālsā Dīwān at Lahore in 1886.

The Amritsar and Lahore Dīwāns indulged in recriminations and this hampered the progress of the Singh Sabhā. Elements neutrally inclined kept voicing the need for a central organization to unite the different sections. The idea met with reverberating support at a large gathering of Sikhs in the Malwaī

Bungā at Amritsar on April 12, 1900. The conference unanimously voted for the establishment of a Khālsā Dīwān supreme in the affairs of the community and formed a committee to draw up the constitution of such a unitary body. Among the members of the committee were Sardār Sundar Singh Majīthīā, Bhāī Kāhn Singh of Nābhā, Sardār Āyā Singh, District Judge, Sardār Sādhū Singh of the Forest Department, Sardār Dharam Singh, Assistant Engineer, Giānī Thākur Singh, Bhāī Jawāhir Singh, Secretary, Khālsā College Council, and Sardār Gurbakhsh Singh, Barrister-at-Law. The last-named was appointed secretary of the committee.

The draft of the constitution prepared by the committee was sent to all the Singh Sabhās and to eminent Sikhs in different walks of life. It was discussed at a meeting in Burj Giānīān at Amritsar on November 9, 1901. A larger assembly took place on November 10, which proposed that efforts should, in the first instance, be made to reorganize the Khālsā Dīwān at Lahore to impart to it a representative character. There being no response from the Lahore Dīwān, the committee decided, on August 19, 1902, to set up a main council of Sikh Panth called the Chief Khālsā Dīwān, and nominated to this end the Chief Khālsā Dīwān Prabandhak Committee.

The first session of the Chief Khālsā Dīwān was held in the Malwaī Bungā on October 30, 1902. Tejā Singh of Bhasaur recited the inaugural *ardās*. Bhāī Arjan Singh of Bāgrīān was elected president and Sardār Sundar Singh Majīthīā secretary, with Sodhī Sujān Singh of Patiālā as additional secretary. Twenty-nine Singh Sabhās, including those of Amritsar, Rāwalpindī, Agra, Kairon, Chhajjalvaddī, Bopārāi, Dākhā and Badbar, a small village in Nābhā state, were affiliated to the Chief Khālsā Dīwān at its first session. The Chief Khālsā Dīwān now became the principal spokesman of the Sikh community and the medium of channelizing its religious and cultural resurgence.

CHAPTER XIX

REORIENTATION II

Along with its revivalist impulse, Sikhism at this moment was looking to the future as well. It accepted the principle of change and renovation and exhibited sensitiveness to contemporary needs. From this period of the stirring of the spirit, the Sikhs emerged with a strong sense of self-preservation as well as with a will to move with the times. One of the more concretely formulated urges was for Western-style education so that they might refurbish their own religious and literary conventions and be able to compete with other communities for government employment and have their share in the power then available to Indians. In the farewell address presented to Lord Ripon, the outgoing Viceroy of India, on behalf of the Amritsar Khālsā Dīwān, on November 13, 1884, Kanwar Partāp Singh of Kapūrthalā said:

> Our efforts are now directed to secure the march of that intellectual progress permanently by setting up such institutions as colleges, schools, etc., which will become unceasing sources of benefit to our posterity.

Until the advent of the British, the educational system in the Punjab had been essentially religion-based. The Punjab, under Mahārājā Ranjīt Singh, was a power-locked, insular State. The Mahārājā did admit into his service many foreigners, but they had to restrict themselves wholly to their professional duties. He would not let them intervene in the social and religious life of the people in any manner. It was, nevertheless, one of Ranjīt Singh's ambitions to have an English school established in his capital, and he spoke about it to several visiting padres.

But negotiations fell through every time owing to Ranjīt Singh's refusal to let the Bible be taught in the proposed school.

Ranjīt Singh was a liberal patron of art and letters. He took special care to have his children well educated and trained. He bestowed *jāgīrs* on men known for their scholarly accomplishments, and encouraged his courtiers in their pursuit of learning. His grandson, Kanwar Nau Nihāl Singh, "studied the higher branches of mathematics and astronomy under the famous Akhwand Ali Ahmad who was especially called from the frontier to Lahore." One of his nobles, Lahnā Singh Majīthīā, was a renowned mathematician and engineer. He is said to have translated the *Euclid* from the Arabic into Punjabi. Several European contemporaries testified to his skill in technology. Especially noticeable was the gun he made out of leather useful for artillery purposes. Ajīt Singh Sandhānwālīā and Attar Singh Sandhānwālīā knew Arabic, Sanskrit and Persian, besides English. Ranjīt Singh's second son, Sher Singh, learnt Western sciences from the French generals, and acquired some knowledge of English.

The system of education in Sikh times remained traditional. The most important educational institutions were the *maktabs*. These schools were run by Muslims, but among the scholars Hindus were generally more numerous. Persian was the court language in Ranjīt Singh's reign, though he himself conversed in Punjabi and induced his officers and other people to learn Gurmukhī. Owing to the official status Persian enjoyed, *maktabs* or Persian schools were the most popular. In these schools, students were introduced to Persian characters and texts such as *Gulistān* and *Bostān*. Quran schools, attached to mosques, taught Arabic. For more advanced study in Arabic and in the Muslim sciences and philosophy, there were *madrasās*. *Chatshālās* were schools for mercantile and trading communities who learnt there the various tachygraphic forms of *lande* (for shopkeepers), *mahājanī* (for merchants) and *sarāfī* (for bankers). These schools were conducted by *pādhās*. For Sanskrit learning there were the *pāthshālās*.

Sikhs went to Gurmukhī schools, usually attached to *gurdwārās* or *dharamsālās* in the villages. Children entered these schools between the ages of 5 and 7. Both boys and girls sometimes attended the same school and they learnt Gurmukhī

characters by practising these with their fingers on the ground covered by a layer of *pāndo* or chalk. From this they graduated to the wooden slab called *pattī*, and to the Sikh texts and the multiplication tables.

A Sikh is, by definition, a learner or disciple. It is his obligation to read the Guru Granth, especially the *Japujī* of Guru Nānak. He is a "republican" in the matter of learning and does not recognize the monopoly of it by any religious or social class. Those who could, acquainted themselves with Gurmukhī letters in which the Holy Book is written. The course at Gurmukhī schools comprised the *Bālopadesa*, *Panj Granthī*, *Janamsākhīs*, *Hanūmān Nātak* and *Bhāī Gurdās dīān Vārān*. At the advanced level, students also learnt Vedanta and read *Tulsī Rāmāyāna*, *Vishnu Purāna*, *Adhyātma Rāmāyana*, *Vichār Sāgar*, etc.

In Ranjīt Singh's time there were some well-known schools maintained by State endowment. In Amritsar, for instance, there was Bhāī Jūnā Singh's school, a fairly large one, where both the Guru Granth and the Dasam Granth and the Gurbilāses and other religious books, along with arithmetic, Vyākarana and Purānas, were taught. Meals were supplied to the students by the school and no fees were charged. Similarly, there was Bhāī Lakhan Singh's school which the teacher held in his house teaching religious books. Bhāī Rām Singh, widely known for his learning, had a flourishing school to which students came from distant parts of the country to take lessons in the higher departments of learning such as the scriptures, Vyākarana, Kāvya, Alankāra, Pingala, literature, history, Nītī, arithmetic and astronomy. These schools were endowed with *jāgīrs* and stipends by the Mahārājā. In their *derās* or cloisters, Sikh sectaries, Nirmalās and Udāsīs, kept their own schools. The former specialized in Sanskrit learning.

Ordinary schools in the villages were supported by the local community. The teachers were paid in cash and kind. Pupils usually paid a pice or two per month, with additional donations of a rupee or so on festivals or special occasions in the family such as births and weddings. The average income of the teacher scarcely exceeded Rs 2 a month in cash, but offerings in kind and fees for performing religious ceremonies considerably supplemented his means of subsistence.

This was the system of education prevalent in the Punjab at the time of annexation. Under the new regime, this began to change. The English started opening secular schools. These were religiously neutral vernacular schools which taught Urdu, with elementary arithmetic, geography and history. Urdu, till then completely unknown in indigenous schools, Muslim, Hindu or Sikh, was introduced for the first time by the British, who made it the language of official use at lower levels of administration after Persian was abolished in 1837. The government also opened English schools for higher-grade studies. Another variety consisted of mission schools set up by Christian missionary organizations.

In 1855, the despatch of the Court of Directors of the East India Company, which initiated a new system of education in India, was received in Lahore. The following year the Punjab government established the Department of Public Instruction, with T.W. Arnold, brother of the famous English poet and critic, Matthew Arnold, as director. The Department planned to open thirty single-teacher primary schools in each district at a monthly expense of Rs 15 per school. But to cover a larger area, the scheme was revised and it was decided to open aided schools with a grant of Rs 5 for each, which enabled the Department to have ninety schools instead of thirty originally planned. There were places where the establishment of schools by government was opposed. As the Punjab Administration Report for the year 1861-62 records, Sodhī Sādhū Singh of Kartārpur, a man of importance in the area, had objected to a school being established in his town.

In Bābā Khem Singh Bedī, a widely respected Sikh of his day, the British found an influential ally. He greatly helped the movement for the new schools. He himself sponsored many such in the Rāwalpindī division, and took the lead, especially, in opening schools for Sikh girls.

The example of Christian missions led to the formation of Indian religious societies for opening and maintaining educational institutions after the new pattern. In northern India, this trend manifested itself in the rise of three popular movements—Aligarh, Ārya Samāj, and Singh Sabhā. They favoured the Western style of education and adopted it in the schools and colleges they sponsored. But they were simultaneously committed

to revising their distinctive religious and literary traditions. The cultural resurgence was thus channelized along communal lines. The Aligarh movement incarnated the urge of the Muslims for re-establishing their religious identity and for the development of the Urdu language. Likewise, Vedic religion and Hindi came to be equated with the Ārya Samāj and Sikhism and Punjabi with the Singh Sabhā.

A Government college was established at Lahore in 1864, with the famous linguist, Dr Gottlieb Wilhelm Leitner, as principal. Dr Leitner was a zealous advocate of oriental learning. He founded on January 21, 1865, the Anjuman-i-Punjab with a view to developing literature in Indian languages and disseminating popular knowledge through this medium. The Anjuman held meetings for the discussion of questions of literary, scientific and social interests, sent memorials to the government, established a public library and compiled a number of treatises and translations in Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi. It also started an oriental school and was instrumental in the establishment, in 1870, of the Panjab University College which was assigned to "promoting the diffusion of European science, as far as possible, through the medium of the vernacular languages of the Panjab, improving and extending vernacular literature generally, affording encouragement to the enlightened study of the Eastern classical languages and literature, and associating the learned and influential classes of the Province with the officers of Government in the promotion and supervision of popular education."

Some of the leading members of the Anjuman-i-Punjab became senators of the Panjab University College. Two Sikhs having this dual membership were Rājā Harbans Singh and Sardār Attar Singh of Bhadaur. In the Panjab University College Senate they had to strive hard to get Punjabi, written in Gurmukhī script, recognized as a language worth teaching. There were elements who viewed Punjabi as no more than a "rude dialect," without any literary tradition. At this juncture, it was the well-organized personal library of Attar Singh of Bhadaur, which served to turn the tide of argument on the floor of the Panjab University College Senate. He produced at the meeting, held on March 31, 1877, a list of 389 works, in Gurmukhī script, from his own collection to prove that Punjabi did

possess a written literature. He carried his point, and Punjabi studies gained admittance into the University curriculum. Bhāī Gurmukh Singh (1849-1898) was appointed the first instructor to teach Punjabi at the University College.

On October 14, 1882, this college was converted into the Panjab University. The Punjab Ārya Samāj, established on June 24, 1877, opened in Lahore, in 1886, a school which was raised to a college in 1889. To have a college of their own for imparting instruction in English and in Western sciences and for promoting Punjabi and Sikh studies became an article of faith with the Sikhs. The leaders of the Singh Sabhā worked assiduously to realize this dream. The government too favoured the proposal. In 1890, the Khālsā College Establishment Committee was set up with Colonel W.R.M. Holroyd, Director of Public Instruction, Punjab, as president, and W. Bell, Principal of Government College, Lahore, as secretary. Frederick Pincott, an eminent Orientalist of London, undertook to help the college movement in England. Among the Sikh constituents of this 121-member committee were Sir Attar Singh, Gurdial Singh Mān of Nābhā, Dīwān Gurmukh Singh of Patiālā, Mahant (more commonly, Bhāī) Kāhn Singh, Tutor to the heir apparent of Nābhā state, Professor Gurmukh Singh and Bhāī Jawāhir Singh (1859-1910).

The committee sought especially the support and help of the Sikh princes. To this end, a deputation, on its behalf, waited upon Mahārājā Rājindra Singh of Patiālā on September 7, 1890. In the address presented to the Mahārājā, it said:

> In peacetime, the Sikhs mostly are land-cultivators and artisans—poor men for the most part—and the light of Western education and civilization has not reached them in their remote and ignorant villages. Lethargy has fallen upon the people. The beginnings of disintegration threaten. The religious faith in the Timeless God, once received with enthusiasm from the great Nanak and the sacred Gurus who followed him, is no longer the sustaining power it was. Even the few Khalsa students who come forth from the recognized colleges of the Punjab exhibit a tendency to despise and abandon the religious and civil traditions of their fathers, instead of becoming patriotic leaders to guide their people to higher planes of enlightened usefulness. The great educational institutions of the Province provide culture for "leisured" and well-to-do subjects of the Crown, and show even the less-favoured youth among Hindus

> and Mohammadans the way to emoluments in Government's services, at the Bar, and elsewhere. It is owing, however, to no want of energy on the part of the Sikhs that they have failed more largely to take advantage of these institutions, as may be seen from their readiness to join board and indigenous schools near their homes; but partly because of their traditionary surroundings (mainly agricultural), and partly because of their poverty, Sikh boys have hitherto found little opportunity for joining the larger schools and colleges, thus working their way to intellectual, moral and material advancement. The result is that the Sikh community is very poorly represented in the learned professions; and in posts of honour and responsibility in the civil administration. Sikhs now serving in the British army see their sons left in their native villages, far from the tide of civilization, which is being taken at the flood by the rising generation of other communities. Besides this the purely secular education imparted in public schools is calculated, under existing circumstances, to slowly obliterate the distinctive characteristics of the Sikhs, to check the development of the qualities which enabled them to attain to a proud position, and to merge them finally in the general mass of the surrounding populations.
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> The necessity, therefore, of taking active measures with a view to promoting the welfare of the Sikh community, and removing those disabilities from which they suffer, has engaged for some time past the earnest attention of the Khalsa Dīwan; and the most practical remedy for this state of things will be found in the establishment of a central college with schools attached, so organized as to exercise a beneficial influence over the entire Sikh community. The central institution would be attended by Sikh children of all classes, as well as by Sikh students who succeed in gaining scholarships as awarded by Government and local bodies, and such scholarships as may be founded in connection with the college.

The Mahārājā of Patiālā responded with the promise of a handsome donation and agreed to be the patron of the college. Similarly, the representatives of the committee called on Mahārājā Hīrā Singh of Nābhā on December 26, 1890, and on Mahārājā Jagatjīt Singh of Kapūrthalā on January 21, 1891.

The efforts of the committee, however, received a setback from the controversy that arose between the Khālsā Dīwān of Lahore and the Khālsā Dīwān of Amritsar over the location of the proposed college. The argument became bitter and long-drawn and it is on record that the supporters of Amritsar placed before the Establishment Committee a petition, nearly 2,000 feet long, bearing 46,698 signatures. The question was

ultimately left to be decided by Sir James Lyall, Lt-Governor of the Punjab, who gave Amritsar preference over Lahore. While choosing the actual site, the chief consideration was that it should be beyond the "dangerous influences of city life." The Lt-Governor also held the opinion that it should be near enough to the city to secure to the college• "the occasional visits of the Sikh princes and of gentlemen interested in the important object in view."

The advice given by Sir James was accepted and he laid the foundation-stone of the Khālsā College on March 5, 1892. The teaching started with the opening on October 22, 1893, of middle school classes. This is how the report describes the inaugural ceremonies :

> The Khalsa School was opened on the 22nd October at Amritsar in the late Pandit Bihari Lal's house near the Hall Gate. The religious part of the opening ceremony was conducted a day earlier in the spacious Hall of the school premises, with great enthusiasm. *Asa-di-Var* and other sacred hymns were sung by a selected body of trained musicians, and *karahprasad* was freely distributed. There was a very large gathering of native gentlemen present on the occasion, and they all rose to offer prayers to the Timeless God and to ask Him to grant prosperity to the new institution. After the ceremony was over, a procession was formed of those present, and the whole gathering consisting of about one thousand gentlemen moved, singing hymns, to the Town Hall where a public meeting was already arranged for. The spacious Hall was full, and many had to remain standing in the verandah and on the road. Among those present were noticed Sardar Sir Attar Singh, K.C.I.E., Rais of Bhadaur, Sardar Baghel Singh Jageerdar, Sardar Mul Singh of Butala, Sardar Hira Singh of Ajmer, Sardar Sundar Singh of Majitha, Messrs Warburton and Nieholl, Bhai Gurdit Singh, Rais of Lahore, Sardar Mehr Singh Chhachhi, Sardar Dyal Singh Chhachhi, Sardar Khushal Singh, Extra Assistant Commissioner, Sardar Gulzar Singh Kalianwala, Colonel Jawala Singh of Kapurthala, Sardar Bhajan Singh of Chahal, Rai Bahadur Bhai Mihan Singh, Sardar Chanda Singh, Honorary Magistrate, Rai Gopal Das of Lahore, Lalas Gagur Mull, Karm Chand and Ishar Das of Amritsar, Sardar Sher Ahmed, Imam Din, Pirzada Muhammad Hussain and Khwaja Yusuf Shah, Bhagat Singh and Hira Singh, *granthis* of the Golden Temple, Bhais Gurmukh Singh, Jawahir Singh, Mayya Singh, Ditt Singh and Harbhagat Singh of Lahore, Bhais Sant Singh, Nand Singh, Ishar Singh, Hurnam Singh.

> and Gopal Singh of Amritsar, The District Superintendent of Police, the Principal of M.B. College, Amritsar, were also present with most of the honorary magistrates, civil, judicial and medical officers, pleaders, bankers, secretaries, and presidents of several societies, representatives from Singh Sabhas of Umballa, Ludhiana, Jullundur, Lahore, Gujranwala, Wazirabad, Rawalpindi, Ferozepur, and other districts, members and office-bearers of the Khalsa Diwan and the editors of several newspapers.
> Mr. W. Bell, Principal of the Government College, Lahore, arrived at 9.30 a.m. He was received with warm cheers when he entered the Hall and took his seat. Sardar Sir Attar Singh, K.C.I.E., Vice-President, Khalsa College Council, and Sardar Mul Singh, Extra Assistant Commissioner, moved and seconded that Mr Bell take the chair. Carried by acclamation, Mr Bell thanked the members of the Khalsa College Council and other gentlemen present for the honour done him and asked Bhai Jawahir Singh, Secretary, Khalsa College Council, to give an account of the history of the Khalsa College movement.

Stimulated by the Singh Sabhā preaching, the Sikh youth began to assemble for religious discussion. In 1891 was formed what came to be called the Khālsā Vidyārthī Sabhā or the Sikh Students Club. This association of Sikh young men, the first of its kind, was established at Amritsar on the initiative of Dr Sundar Singh Sodhbans. The Sabhā used to congregate every Saturday. The members would thereafter go to the Harimandir and circumambulate the sacred pool chanting hymns from the Guru Granth. They set up special programmes to mark the anniversaries connected with the lives of the Gurus. But Golden Temple management least appreciated their fervour. On the occasion of their annual meeting in September 1893, the students set out from Bungā Mānānwāliān reciting holy songs. They first went to the Akāl Takht to offer *ardās*, but Bhāī Multānā Singh Ardāsīā refused to lead the prayer for them. He rejected the request for the reason that the young men were in sympathy with the Singh Sabhā and had written in a local newspaper disparagingly about the Golden Temple priests.

Like the question of the location of the Khālsā College, another disputation arose in the closing years of the nineteenth century, splitting the Singh Sabhā even more sharply. The point at issue this time was the electrification of the Golden Temple. Whether or not the sacred building should be electrified became

a raging polemic. There were views, pro and con, and the debate was joined by both sides vehemently—and unyieldingly. As was then the style of making controversies, religious and social, no holds were barred and no acrimonious word spared to settle the argument. If tradition and usage were drawn upon by opponents, need to move with the times was urged by the supporters, pejoratively called *bijlī bhaktas*, the devotees of electricity.

The first manoeuvre initiated from the Srī Guru Singh Sabhā, Amritsar. At its 23rd annual session, on January 26, 1896, it made a formal resolution recommending the installation of electricity in the Golden Temple. Sardār Sundar Singh Majīthīā, the mover, told the assembly that Srī Harimandir which by day was in beauty the very image of *baikunth*, i.e. paradise, was shrouded in darkness by night. Many holy and old people who came to do homage late in the evening or in the small hours of the morning suffered hardship for lack of lighting. Electric light would, pleaded Sundar Singh, enhance the glory of the Golden Temple, and prove a boon to the visiting devotees.

Colonel Jawālā Singh, the officially appointed manager of the Golden Temple, and Master Narain Singh of Khālsā High School, Gujrānwālā, endorsed Sardār Sundar Singh's proposal. An eleven-member committee, with Sardār Bahādur Arjan Singh Chāhal as president, was set up to carry on with the plan. The committee secured the support of influential men in the Sikh community such as Bābā Sir Khem Singh Bedī, Rāi Bahādur Sardār Sujān Singh (d. 1923) of Rāwalpindī, and Sardār Balwant Singh of Attārī. Subscription lists were opened and fund-raising started in towns and villages.

The lighting committee sent a deputation to wait on Rājā Bikram Singh (1842-98) of Farīdkot, who was the patron of the Khālsā Dīwān of Amritsar and helped religious and public causes with an open hand. Colonel Jawālā Singh and Sardār Sundar Singh Majīthīā, who led the group to Farīdkot, returned with an assurance from the Mahārājā for financial support. At a meeting held at Akāl Takht on April 25, 1897, three of the courtiers sent by him announced on his behalf that, in commemoration of the uninterrupted sixty-year rule of Queen

Victoria, he would have electricity installed in the Golden Temple premises at a cost of twenty thousand rupees.

Then opposition raised its head. In May 1897, three *granthīs* of the Golden Temple served a registered notice on Sundar Singh Majīthīā, secretary of the lighting committee, censuring the scheme.

On June 22, 1897, the Diamond Jubilee was observed by the Sikhs in Amritsar. Kanwar Gajendra Singh, son of Rājā Bikram Singh, participated in the celebrations. On this occasion electricity was displayed in the Golden Temple by importing temporarily into the precincts the private generator belonging to a local citizen, Rāi Dholan Dās.

Rājā Bikram Singh visited Amritsar on August 1, 1897, and, at a public meeting, announced a donation of one lakh rupees for electricity as well as for a new building for Guru-kā-Langar. Part of the money was invested in a generating set and accessories.

The opponents had not been idle. On July 29, 1897, the executive committee of the Lahore Singh Sabhā placed on record its disapproval of the proposal. The three Golden Temple *granthīs*, Bhāī Harnām Singh, Bhāī Bhagat Singh and Bhāī Partāp Singh, published a letter in the *Khālsā Akhbār* of Lahore, August 27, 1897, openly attacking the scheme. Argument upon argument was marshalled to show the utter inappropriateness of inducting electricity into the sacred premises. The article was repeated in a tract entitled *Bijlī Bidāran* (Demolition of Electricity).

Electricity was dangerous. To substantiate the point, allusion was made to the title of government enactment of 1887 which ran as follows: *An act to provide for the protection of person and property from the risks incident to the supply and use of electricity for lighting and other purposes.* Another extract quoted was from *The Civil and Military Gazette* of Lahore, October 27, 1897: "Several persons in America have lost their lives in various cities through coming in contact with electric light and power wires." Instances were mentioned of the damage caused by electricity to a factory in Dhārīwāl and the disorder created at the inaugural ceremonies for the opening of the Sirhind canal. The *granthīs* argued that there was no example of electricity being installed either in Bethlehem or in

Ka'aba. Of the 1,400 churches in London, not one had been electrified—not even Westminster Abbey. Third, it was urged, custom and tradition sanctioned only illumination by *ghee*. Electricity was sheer extravagance. Its dazzle would hinder concentration and meditation. As a *coup de grace*, the point was pressed that electric light was western and the building eastern. The two were contradictory.

The *granthīs* were backed by the *pujārīs* of Takht Srī Abichalnagar at Nānded, who rejected all other lighting except that by *ghee* which alone had the necessary sanctity. Bābū Tejā Singh of Bhasaur contributed to the *Khālsā Akhbār*, September 3, 1897, a letter to make the point that the real light the Sikhs needed was for the elimination of distinctions of caste in the community. For Harimandir, lighting by *ghee*, permitted by their eastern custom, was the most appropriate. Another correspondent in a letter in the *Khālsā Akhbār*, August 27, 1897, had stated that he had enquired from the Archbishop of the Punjab and learnt that there was no electric light in St Peter's or in St Paul's. He also recalled the criticism made by Englishmen themselves who termed the gothic-style clocktower beside the Golden Temple a monstrosity. Western light inside the Temple would be similarly offensive, he concluded.

In its editorial on August 6, 1897, the *Khālsā Akhbār* commented that the Golden Temple was not a museum to which people had to be allured by such meretricious display. On August 20, 1897, it praised the Rājā of Farīdkot for his munificence in providing funds for electricity, but satirized his friends who had counselled him this kind of extravagance.

In the *Khālsā Akhbār* for August 6, 1897, Srī Guru Singh Sabhā of Jullundur published a note in support of the *granthīs*. One of the questions raised was: "What will happen if the engine went out of order?" In its editorial the same day, the *Khālsā Akhbār* wrote: "What the Sikhs needed was the light of the Gurus' Word rather than that of electricity?"

Electricity, when it came, did appear a novelty. Visiting the Golden Temple after an interval of sixteen years, Dr John Campbell Oman, who had been a Professor at Government College at Lahore (1877-97) and Principal of the Khālsā College at Amritsar (1898-99), referred to it in these terms:"... the garish electric light installed on the temple itself amidst

the modest old-world *cherāghs,* looking like an ill-mannered, obtrusive upstart completely out of its proper element."

The advocates of *bijlī* had won. But the controversy left behind a trail of bitterness. Essentially, it was a conflict between the Lahore and Amritsar wings of the Singh Sabhā. There had been other instances of bickering between the Lahore and Amritsar groups. The clash was primarily of personalities. The ideological undercurrent which did play its part was not clearly definable. One section, described as conservative, sympathized with the rebel Mahārājā Duleep Singh and had electricity installed in the Golden Temple. The other, generally progressive, deprecated the display of Mahārājā Duleep Singh's portrait at a Sikh *dīvān* as something likely to offend the government, contested electricity and had as its president a chief who was a constant purveyor of intelligence to the government. In whatever personal or social terms those tensions might be interpreted, they were a reality of the Sikh situation in the closing decades of the last century and a sign of the new energy coursing through the veins of the community.

The Amritsar group was led by Rājā Bikram Singh of Farīdkot who was the patron of the Khālsā Dīwān to which different Singh Sabhās were meant to be affiliated. Bābā Khem Singh Bedī was the president. The Lahore group was led by Professor Gurmukh Singh, Giānī Ditt Singh and Sardār Attar Singh, chief of Bhadaur. The Rāwalpindī Singh Sabhā, which was under the influence of Bābā Khem Singh Bedī, wanted the name Singh Sabhā to be changed to Sikh Singh Sabhā to enable non-baptized Sikhs to enroll as members like baptized ones. The question was taken up at the annual meeting of the Khālsā Dīwān in April 1884. The proposal was opposed by Professor Gurmukh Singh, who suggested that the question be, in the first instance, referred to the representatives of the various Singh Sabhās. There was a row at the meeting and it broke up in confusion.

In November 1884, Lord Ripon, the Viceroy, who was retiring, came to Amritsar to pay his last visit to the Golden Temple. In the programme, the Sikh address was slated at number three. This the Sikhs resented, for they felt that in the city of Amritsar they should be afforded the opportunity to

present their address first. The Lahore Singh Sabhā leaders, Sardār Bikramā Singh Āhlūwālīā and Sardār Attar Singh of Bhadaur, called upon the Lt-Governor and had the Sikh address placed at the top of the roster, and the Viceroy agreed to receive it before the addresses of other communities. In recognition of what was described as their signal service to the community, Sardār Bikramā Singh and Sardār Attar Singh were made Vice-Patrons of the Khālsā Dīwān, much to the annoyance of the Amritsar group.

In March 1885, an address was proposed to be presented to Lord Dufferin who was visiting the Punjab. A copy of the Sikh address had been sent to the Viceroy in advance. But at the instance of the President of the Khālsā Dīwān, Bābā Khem Singh Bedī, another draft was prepared, this one in Gurmukhī. Tikkā Balbīr Singh, the heir apparent of Farīdkot state, who was to read the English address, was, at the time of the ceremony, thrust back by the son of Bābā Khem Singh, who started reading the Gurmukhī address instead. The Viceroy did not follow anything and, in his speech, replied to the English address a copy of which had been sent to him earlier.

The publication of a book in Urdu entitled *Khurshīd Khālsā* written by Bāwā Nihāl Singh, caused further antagonism between the two parties. The book contained passages against the government and favoured Mahārājā Duleep Singh. To this the Lahore party objected and asked the author to withdraw the book. Gurmukh Singh, as secretary of the Khālsā Dīwān, issued a letter in October 1885, clearing the Dīwān of any connection with the publication and throwing the whole responsibility on the author and the publisher. The author of the *Khurshīd Khālsā* had the backing of the Amritsar party.

Bābā Khem Singh, being a direct descendant of Guru Nānak, used to sit in the Sikh congregations on a *gudailā* or cushion. This happened sometimes even in front of the Guru Granth. The Lahore party objected to it. This was another point of friction between the two sections. The Lahore party derisively called its rival Gudailā party or Guru-making party.

In Giānī Ditt Singh's *Khālsā Akhbār* for April 16, 1887, appeared in the form of a supplement a portion of a dream-story entitled *Swapan Nātak*. Bedī Udey Singh brought a suit

against the editor complaining that he and some others of the Amritsar party had been satirized in the publication. Udey Singh was a nephew of Bābā Khem Singh and drew an allowance from the Rājā of Farīdkot. The court did not believe that the drama was intended to burlesque the members of the Amritsar party. Bhāī Ditt Singh was acquitted by Mr Bird, Divisional Judge, Lahore, on April 30, 1888. The complainant sought redress from the Privy Council, but had his appeal rejected.

The incident which led to the decline of the Amritsar party was the display of Mahārājā Duleep Singh's photograph at the anniversary meeting of the Guru Nānak Panth Prakāsh Sabhā in Lahore in 1887. The Sabhā was the creation of the Amritsar group and enjoyed the patronage of Rājā Bikram Singh of Farīdkot. Mahārājā Duleep Singh had by that time turned a rebel and the display of his photograph was highly provocative to the government, which looked upon this act with disfavour.

The Khālsā College, opened with elaborate ceremony, was, not long after, faced with a serious financial crisis. Even Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of India, who was the patron of the College, felt concerned and visited the Phūlkīān states exhorting their rulers to help the institution. The management called a large Sikh conference at the Khālsā College on April 12, 1904. Along with the Sikh nobility which had turned out with great *eclat*, representatives of various Singh Sabhās and societies were present. Mahārājā Hīrā Singh of Nābhā presided. Most dramatic was the moment when, at the end of the presidential address, Sardār Sundar Singh Majīthīā stood up and held out the hem of his cloak in front of Mahārājā Hīrā Singh as a begging-bowl. Donations came readily from Mahārājās, their courtiers and other *sardārs*. On behalf of the Sikh peasantry, a resolution was moved that all Sikh landowners pay into the college fund six pies in a rupee on their government revenue demands. The resolution was adopted amidst joyous shouts of *satsrīakāl*.

The conference not only brought the Khālsā College on an even keel, but also rejuvenated the Sikh educational enterprise. This was institutionalized in the Sikh Educational Conference founded in 1908. The proposal for such a conference was for

the first time mooted by Niranjan Singh, Officiating Principal of Khālsā College, Amritsar, in his annual report presented in 1905. Outlining some of the measures that could be taken to raise funds for the Khālsā College, he suggested the launching of "a movement under the name of the Sikh Educational Conference and holding its sittings on the occasions of Dīvālī and Baisākhī festivals."

Some of a Sikh missionary group headed by Sardār Sundar Singh Majīthīā visiting Sind happened to attend one of the sessions of the Muhammadan Educational Conference at Karachi in December 1907. Among them was Sodhī Sujān Singh of Patiālā, who picked the idea that there should be a similar conference set up for the Sikh community. Returning to Amritsar, Sundar Singh called at his residence a meeting on January 9, 1908, inviting leading Sikhs of the day. Among those who attended the meeting were Bhāī Vīr Singh, Bhāī Jodh Singh (1882-1981), educationist and theologian who became the first Vice-Chancellor of Punjabi University in 1962, and Sardār Harbans Singh of Attārī (1878-1936). A still larger meeting was called ten days later and plans were formulated for the establishment of Sikh Educational Conference. Those invited included Sardār Umrāo Singh Majīthīā, Sardār Khazān Singh, Bar-at-Law, and Sardār Inder Singh who later became prime minister in Farīdkot state. To draw up the creed and constitution of the conference, a sub-committee consisting of Sardār Gurcharan Singh, Bar-at-Law, of Rājāsānsī, Sardār Kharak Singh, Pleader, of Lahore, Bhāī Dān Singh, B.A., Bhāī Jodh Singh, M.A., and Bābū Gulāb Singh was constituted.

Among the objectives laid down for the conference were (a) spread of Western education among the Sikhs; (b) promotion of the study of Sikh literature; (c) improvement of Sikh educational institutions; (d) opening of new educational institutions; (e) furthering the cause of female education among the Sikhs; and (f) promotion of technical and agricultural education.

The first session of the Conference was held at Gujrānwālā from April 18-19, 1908. Sardār Baghel Singh of Kullā, a graduate of Banāras Hindu University, was president of the Conference, and Sardār Balwant Singh Butālīā chairman of the reception committee. Two of the major speeches delivered

were "Our Educational Condition and How to Improve It" by Bhāī Jodh Singh and "Education of Our Women" by Sardār Shivdev Singh Uberoi. The first resolution called upon the Sikhs to give for the educational progress of the community *dasvandh* or one-tenth of their income. Another resolution appealed to the Secretary of State for India to have the rules requiring students at the various Inns of Court to wear caps relaxed in the case of Sikhs. Special scholarships were demanded from government for Sikh students in view of the general backward condition of the community. The postal and railway authorities were requested increasingly to adopt for use Punjabi, in Gurmukhī script. The Director of Public Instruction was requested to provide Punjabi teachers for secondary schools run by the Department and Sikh graduates were called upon to translate standard works into Punjabi for the advancement of Punjabi language and literature.

The Singh Sabhā's eagerness for the promotion of education and Punjabi language led to unprecedented activity in the fields of literature and learning. Bābā Sir Khem Singh Bedī was the first to start Gurmukhī schools in the Punjab. These schools, opened primarily in the districts of Rāwalpindī, Jhelum and Gujrāt, fostered the study of Punjabi, in the Gurmukhī script. Punjabi schools were also opened in Amritsar, Lahore and Ferozepore and in some of the villages such as Kairon, Gharjākh, Chūhar Chakk and Bhasaur. The Sikh Kanyā Mahāvidyālā, started by Bhāī Takht Singh (1860-1937) at Ferozepore, Khālsā Bhujangan School, started by Sardār Nihāl Singh (1863-1935) at Kairon, and Vidyā Bhandār, started by Bābū Tejā Singh at Bhasaur, served the cause of women's education and were among the first schools of their kind in the Punjab.

With a donation from Mahārājā Hīrā Singh of Nābhā, the Khālsā Printing Press was set up at Lahore. Kanwar Jagjodh Singh, a grandson of Mahārājā Ranjīt Singh, started in his estate in Oudh the Guru Nānak Prakāsh Press. He employed several scholars with whose help he published a number of works in Punjabi. Newspaper and tractarian writing stimulated by the Singh Sabhā movement established the form of Punjabi prose disinheriting it of the more pretentious and conventional elements. The pioneer in the line was the weekly

Khālsā Akhbār of Giānī Jhandā Singh Farīdkotī. This paper rose to its full stature under Giānī Ditt Singh. He was an accomplished scholar and a considerable poet and especially excelled at argument, never yielding to anybody a point in polemics. He sometimes wrote the newspaper leaders and comments in verse, too.

Another important newspaper of this period was the *Khālsā Samāchār*, founded by Dr Charan Singh in 1899. It had the benefit of the association with it of Dr Charan Singh's son, Bhāī Vīr Singh. In the latter's hands, the *Khālsā Samāchār* set a high standard of Punjabi prose-writing and of religious discussion. Under the same patronage, the Khālsā Tract Society of Amritsar produced a series of books and tracts on Sikh lore and piety. Besides Punjabi, there were also papers started in Urdu. Among these, two well-known ones were Bhāī Mayyā Singh's *Khālsā Gazette* and Sardār Amar Singh's *Loyal Gazette*, which later turned into the formidable *Sher-i-Punjab*.

Weightier works of learning on Sikh history and philosophy began to appear. Pandit Tārā Singh Narotam (1822-91), a renowned Nirmalā scholar, prepared a lexicon of the Guru Granth. His celebrated disciple, Giānī Giān Singh (1822-1921), published his classical volumes on the history of Sikhs, namely the *Panth Prakāsh* and the *Tawārīkh Guru Khālsā*. Giānī Hazārā Singh, Giānī Sardūl Singh, Bābā Sumer Singh of Patnā Sāhib, Dr Charan Singh and Bhāī Ditt Singh were other eminent men of letters who enriched Sikh learning by their writings. After them came Bhāī Kāhn Singh of Nābhā (1867-1938) and Bhāī Vīr Singh. The former enjoyed unequalled celebrity for his impeccable taste and wide learning and wrote a number of books such as the *Gurmat Prabhākar* and the *Gurmat Sudhākar*, besides a comprehensive encyclopaedia of Sikh literature, the *Gurshabad Ratnākar Mahān Kosh*. His *Ham Hindu Nahīn* (We Are Not Hindus, meaning Sikhs are not Hindus), first published in 1897, in its deliberately challenging title as well as in its daring argument, reflected tellingly the Singh Sabhā emphasis on Sikh identity. Bhāī Vīr Singh presented the exemplary nobility and glory of Sikh character in his historical romances which have thrilled and influenced generations of Sikh readers. The *Purātan Janamsākhī*, which

is one of the oldest biographies of Guru Nānak and which preserves the earliest style of Punjabi prose, was, with the help of the government, resurrected from the British Museum and published. Rājā Bikram Singh of Farīdkot, who was one of the chief protagonists of the Singh Sabhā, had a commentary of the Guru Granth prepared by a distinguished synod of Sikh schoolmen of the period. This work, popularly known as the *Farīdkot Tīkā*, is the first authentic record of the traditional interpretation of the sacred text coming down from the days of the Gurus, and occupies for this reason a unique position in Sikh exegetical literature.

Some foreigners also took to the study of the Sikh faith. The India Office commissioned a German orientalist, Dr Ernest Trumpp, to render Sikh Scripture into English. To make up for the imperfections of Dr Trumpp's work and to assuage the Sikh sentiment hurt by the offensive tone of some of his comments, Max Arthur Macauliffe (1841-1913), a member of the Indian Civil Service, resigned his post to undertake a fresh rendering of the Guru Granth. His translations of the Sikh hymns, along with a detailed history of the period covered by the ten Gurus of the Sikhs, were published in six volumes by the Oxford University Press in 1909. Among the Sikhs who first wrote of their religion in English were Nihāl Singh Sūrī, who published translations of the sacred hymns, and Bhagat Lakshman Singh who wrote two admirable books, *Life of Guru Gobind Singh* and *Sikh Martyrs*. Sewārām Singh published his book on the life and teaching of Guru Nānak in 1904, and Khazān Singh his *History and Philosophy of Sikh Religion* in 1914. Sant Tejā Singh, who had taken his Master's degree at Harvard University, carried on missionary work among the Sikh immigrants in the United States and Canada and published several tracts on Sikhism. Finest work in English came from the pen of Professor Tejā Singh whose exposition of Sikhism and renderings of the holy texts such as the *Japujī*, *Āsā-dī-Vār* and the *Sukhmanī* (The Psalm of Peace) created a new intellectual taste in the community. Till then only one frame of reference—the Vedantic—was available for the interpretation of Sikhism. Contact with Western thought brought forth many another standpoint and insight. A fresh understanding of Sikh

philosophy and tradition began to emerge through the writings of the English-educated Sikh scholars.

For the Sikhs the Singh Sabhā was a great regenerating force. It articulated the inner urge of Sikhism for reform and gave it a decisive direction at a crucial moment of its history, quickening its latent sources of energy. A comparison between the state of Sikhism before the Singh Sabhā and since will reveal the extent of its moral effect. The Sikh faith had waned incredibly before the first stirrings of the movement were felt. A sense of lassitude pervaded Sikh society which had sunk back into the priest-ridden, debilitating cults antithetical to Sikh monotheism. The teaching of the Gurus had been forgotten and the Guru Granth, confined to the *gurdwārā*, had become the concern only of the Bhāī and the Granthī. From this condition the Singh Sabhā rescued the Sikhs, bringing to them a new awareness of their past and of the excellence of their faith. The Singh Sabhā touched the very base, the mainsprings of Sikh life and resuscitated the essential content of Sikh belief and exercise. It enhanced the intellectual capacity of the Sikhs and restored to them their creedal unity and their religious conscience. It opened for them the doors of modern progress and endowed them with the strength and adaptability to match the pressures created by new social and scientific currents. The momentum which the Singh Sabhā gave to Sikh resurgence still continues. The principal concepts and concerns of Sikhism today are those given or restored to it by the Singh Sabhā. Its understanding of Sikh history, belief and tradition retains its validity. The practice and ritual it established still prevail, largely and centrally. The form of Sikhism as defined by Singh Sabhā will remain valid for generations to come.

CHAPTER XX

RENEWAL OF THE HERITAGE OF SUFFERING

The motivation for reform born of the Singh Sabhā created in turn a popular upsurge in the shape of the Akālī movement. An immediate provocation was afforded by the clergy who had come into control of the Sikh holy places from the time the Sikhs were driven by Mughal oppression to seek safety in remote hills and deserts. A kind of professional coenobitism, contrary to the character of Sikhism, had since developed. Some of the sinister aspects of the new system became apparent soon after the reign of Ranjit Singh. Most of the clergy had become neglectful of their religious office. They had converted ecclesiastical assets into private properties, and their lives were not free from the taint of licentiousness and luxury. The simple form of Sikh service had been supplanted in the shrines by extravagant ceremonial. This was repugnant to Sikhs freshly affranchised by the preachings of the Singh Sabhā. The puritan reaction through which they had passed led them to revolt against this retrogression and maladministration of their places of worship.

While attempting to free the *gurdwārās* from clerical control, they came into clash with the government. For five years they carried on their peaceful, but extremely trying, battle to establish their title to managing their own sacred shrines. During this period they underwent endless tribulation and suppression and added glory to their annals by renewing their heritage of patient suffering for their faith. The black turban of the Akālīs, the reformers, had become in the eyes of government a symbol of sedition. Apart from bearing the trial manfully, the Sikhs by their persistent resistance forced the government to surrender on every issue that arose. The Akālīs'

victories against the government were complete and they marked the first tangible dents in the prestige of India's foreign masters. When the Sikhs compelled the Punjab government to return to them the keys of the Golden Temple treasury which had been seized by order of the British Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar, Mahatma Gandhi sent the following wire to Sardār Kharak Singh (1867-1963), president of the Shiromanī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee:

> First decisive battle for India's freedom won congratulations
> M.K. Gandhi

Before the Akālī movement started, the Sikhs' patriotic fervour had found expression in a series of conflicts with the government. The first of these occurred in the Khālsā College at Amritsar. A remark made by Major John Hill, one of the British members of the Managing Council, denouncing as nonsense the honorary service the Sikh engineer, Sardār Dharam Singh, was rendering for the college, sparked off a strong reaction. Such service in the cause of the community or commonwealth, which they call *sevā*, is greatly esteemed by the Sikhs and carries the highest religious sanction in their system. The derogatory words of Major Hill created a sensation in the community. As many as seventy-five Sikh associations registered their protest by passing resolutions. The students of the college wore black badges and kept a fast on February 10, 1907, when the British engineer came to take over the post vacated by Dharam Singh. The government retaliated by changing the constitution of the college and assuming the management into its own hands. The Sikh princely states withheld their annuities. A few Sikh professors, including Bhāī Jodh Singh who held the chair of Divinity, had to leave the college. The Sikhs were resolved to have the official control abrogated. This became a point at issue between them and the government and the latter had to yield in the end.

The demolition by the government in 1913 of the compound wall of Gurdwārā Rikābganj in Delhi where the Ninth Sikh prophet, Guru Tegh Bahādur, martyred at the behest of Emperor Aurangzib, had been cremated gave further umbrage to the Sikhs. The government's purpose was to secure symmetry

in their construction plans for the main buildings in New Delhi such as the Viceroy's house and the secretariat. However, the pulling down of this enclosure around the holy shrine provoked a spontaneous outburst of feeling against the government. Sardār Sardūl Singh Caveeshar (1886-1963), one of the leaders of the agitation, asked through his newspaper for 100 Sikhs to volunteer to go to Delhi with him and repair the demolished portion of the wall, or, if the government obstructed them, to lay down their lives. Seven hundred Sikhs offered themselves. But before they could assemble for the march to Delhi, Mahārājā Ripudaman Singh of Nābhā intervened and helped the government out of the impasse by offering to have the Rikābganj wall rebuilt at his own expense.

Another episode which caused excitement among the Sikhs related to the *Komagata Maru* or the Guru Nānak Jahāz, launched from Hong Kong by Bābā Gurdit Singh (1860-1954), an adventurous Sikh businessman, to take a batch of Indian emigrants to Canada. This was done to circumvent the new Canadian Immigration Ordinances which, aiming to stop the influx of Indians, prohibited entry into Canada of persons of every nationality except by a "continuous journey on through tickets from the country of their birth or citizenship." There was no direct shipping service from India to Canada and the object of the Canadian government in passing the ordinances was specifically to debar the Indians. Sikhs had gone to Canada and to several other foreign lands in large numbers and they resented the restrictions imposed by the Canadian authorities. Of the 376 passengers on board the *Komagata Maru*, 359 were Sikhs. On May 23, 1914, the ship reached Vancouver, and, although the condition of a through journey to Canada had been fulfilled, the passengers were not allowed to land. After having been stalled in the sea for two months—a period of grave hardship for the passengers—the ship was turned back. Bābā Gurdit Singh's Sikhs became rebels in the eyes of the government and, at Budge Budge, near Calcutta, his ship was searched for any arms he might be smuggling into India. In Calcutta, a special train was kept ready for the passengers to be transported back the Punjab. All of the seventeen Muslim passengers obeyed government orders and boarded the train. The Sikh passengers refused and, forming themselves into a

procession with the Guru Granth at the head of it, wended their way towards the city. British troops and police turned out and forced them back to the railway station where, owing to the highhandedness of some European sergeants who interrupted the evening Sikh prayer the passengers were reciting on the platform, a clash took place. Nineteen of the Sikhs and two European officers and two men of the Punjab police were killed. All the rest of the passengers police could lay their hands on were taken into custody. Bābā Gurdit Singh, however, escaped and for seven years, packed with adventure and drama, he eluded the police. On Guru Nānak's birthday anniversary in 1921, he made a sudden public appearance at Nankānā Sāhib and offered himself for arrest. The heroic deeds of the *Komagata Maru* men and their trials aroused the admiration and sympathy of the entire Indian nation.

The Sikhs who had adventured abroad organized and led associations to work for India's freedom in countries such as Canada and the United States of America. At a time when political ambition of the Indian parties was moderate, these patriotic organizations in foreign lands preached a revolutionary creed aiming at the overthrow of British rule. Sikhs were the leaders of this movement and even their *gurdwārās* and religious associations like the Khālsā Dīwāns served as instruments of a well-organized campaign against the English. Secret missives and tracts used to be sent into the country, especially to subvert the Indian armies and incite them to mutiny. Punjabi was the most popular vehicle of this inflammatory literature. On April 21, 1913, the Hindi Association of the Pacific Coast, which came to be known as the Ghadr Party, was established in America with the object of bringing about an armed rebellion in India. Bābā Sohan Singh Bhaknā, a Sikh farmer from Amritsar district, became its first president. The *Ghadr*, the weekly organ of the party which was printed in San Francisco in Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu and several other Indian languages, carried its message of violence and sedition to wherever Indians were. Upon the outbreak of hostilities in Europe, it published in its issue for August 5, 1914, a declaration of war against the British.

Many Indians, most of them Sikhs, settled in America, Canada, Singapore, Malaya and other foreign lands, hurriedly

wound up their affairs in their eagerness for desperate action and, staking their all on the venture, departed for India to make mutiny in the country. A network of secret association was laid out and sympathies of Indian soldiers enlisted. February 21, 1915, was fixed for a general rising, but the plan was divulged prematurely by a police spy who had surreptitiously gained entry into the Ghadr Party.

A reign of terror was unleashed by the government. The Ghadrites were hunted out and given severe punishments. In what is known as the first Lahore Conspiracy case, seven were sentenced to death and the rest transported for life or committed to varying terms of imprisonment. Among the seven who kissed the hangman's noose were six Sikhs, namely Kartār Singh of Sarābhā (Ludhiānā), Bakhshīsh Singh of Gilwālī (Amritsar), Jagat Sīngh of Sursingh (Lahore), Surain Singh (I) of Gilwālī (Amritsar), Surain Singh (II) of Gilwālī (Amritsar), and Bhāī Harnām Singh of Bhattī Gurāyā (Gurdāspur). Several other similar trials were held in India, Burma and San Francisco. Among those gaoled for long terms of imprisonment were the Sikh mystic, Bhāī Randhīr Singh (1878-1961), and his colleague Giānī Nāhar Singh (d. 1972), who later made a reputation for himself as a journalist.

The Ghadr movement was almost wholly Sikh. How those adventurous men combined religious fervour with radical politics and how they defied death as well as danger will be illustrated by two typical instances. There was one Nidhān Singh born in 1851 in the village of Chugghā, in Ferozepore district. At the age of thirty-one, he set out for Shanghai where he initially worked as a watchman and helped to build a *gurdwārā* of which he became the treasurer. He married a Chinese woman and had one son. He lived in Shanghai for three decades and then migrated to the United States of America. He joined the Ghadr Party and rose to be a member of its executive committee. In April 1914, he was elected president of the newly established Khālsā Dīwān Society at Stockton. On the outbreak of World War I, he, like other Ghadrites, returned to India to wage war on the British. He left San Francisco on board the *Korea* on August 29, 1914. He disembarked at Nagasaki and went on to Shanghai to raise funds for the Ghadr Party. Money which had been collected for the *Komagata Maru*

passengers, who were not allowed to land in Shanghai, was transferred to Nidhān Singh. With this money and with six automatic pistols and 600 rounds of ammunition, he left Shanghai aboard the *Mashima Maru*. This ship and the *Tosha Maru*, both carrying contingents of Ghadrites, arrived in Penang at approximately the same time and were detained by the British. Nidhān Singh spent the time trying to seduce the troops and get arms, but without much success.

He reached Ludhiānā on November 7, 1914, and was assigned to setting up factories for making bombs. He established two—one at Jhābewāl and the other at Lohatbaddī. His object was to raid the regimental magazine at Ferozepore Cantonment. He even fixed a date for it—November 13, 1914, but his plan aborted. He was arrested disguised as a wandering mendicant in the village of Kamālpurā along with Rūr Singh of Chūhar Chak, on April 19, 1915. Tried in the first Lahore Conspiracy case, he was awarded death sentence which was later commuted to transportation for life. On November 28, 1930, he was released from Multān gaol.

A deeply religious person and a staunch believer in the Sikh faith, Nidhān Singh was nominated one of the Panj Piārās, the Five Elect, who laid the cornerstone of the Harimandir at Panjā Sāhib on October 14, 1932. He was president of the Gurdwārā Singh Sabhā, Mogā. He died in this Gurdwārā on December 6, 1936, after a brief illness.

Ūdham Singh was born on March 15, 1882, at Kasel, a village in Amritsar district. He passed his early years in his village grazing cattle and working on the family's small farm. He had had no formal education. In 1907, he left home to seek his fortune abroad. He first went to Penang and then to Taiping, and became a signaller in the Malay States Guides. Resigning from the Guides, he travelled on to America where he came into contact with revolutionaries such as Sohan Singh Bhaknā, Jawālā Singh and Wasākhā Singh, who helped him in securing a job in a lumber mill in Oregon State. Ūdham Singh was soon drawn into the Ghadr movement, and was appointed one of the "generals" for imparting military training to the Punjabis. On his way back home, he visited Canton and Penang to purchase arms. As he reached India on board the *Tosha Maru*, he was seized by the police. He was tried in the first

Lahore Conspiracy case and sentenced to transportation for life. He was sent to the Andamans and later to Coimbatore. In 1921 he escaped from gaol and, after many a hair-raising adventure, reached the Punjab from where he smuggled himself out into Kabul. While in Kabul, he set up the Khālsā Dīwān and sought the Afghan King's permission for Sikhs to assemble in religious congregation at Gurdwārā Chashmā Sāhib, sacred to Guru Nānak. Every year, he used to travel incognito to Amritsar to pay homage at the Golden Temple on holy festivals. On January 20, 1926, he was, while returning to Kabul from one such visit, waylaid by two Pathāns and murdered. The Pathāns were boycotted by their community when they heard stories of the revolutionary career of Ūdham Singh.

The Sikhs by their instinctive passion for freedom and by virtue of their qualities of adventure and determination thus added an inspiring chapter to the history of India.

To a people passing through such a ferment, the stilted ritual followed in their places of worship looked disgracefully anachronistic. The Sikh *gurdwārās* were tenanted by priests who were unfamiliar with the fundamental principles of the faith. The Sikhs' central shrine, the Golden Temple at Amritsar, was controlled by the British Deputy Commissioner through a Sikh manager whom he appointed. There were idols installed within the temple precincts. Pandits and astrologers sat on the premises plying their trade unchecked. Pilgrims from the backward classes were not allowed inside the Harimandir before 9 o'clock in the morning. This was sheer defilement of Sikhism, which permitted neither caste nor image-worship. Vaguely, the feeling had been prevalent among the Sikhs since almost the advent of the British that the administration of the Harimandir at Amritsar was far from satisfactory. The religious ritual practised defied the teachings of the Gurus. One audible voice of protest was that of Sardār Thākur Singh Sandhānwālīā, who was a member of Srī Darbār Sāhib Committee in the seventies of the last century. The Khālsā Dīwān, Lahore, at its session convened from April 6-8, 1907, proposed that the manager of the Golden Temple appointed by government be removed and a committee of Sikh chiefs appointed in his place. Likewise, the Khālsā Dīwān Mājhā, meeting at Tarn Tāran on

April 9-10, 1907, recorded its concern about the management of the holy shrine.

On October 12, 1920, a meeting of Sikh backward castes, sponsored by teachers and students of the Khālsā College was held in Jalliānwālā Bāgh at Amritsar. The following morning some of them were taken to the Harimandir, but the priests refused to accept *karāhprasād* they had brought as an offering and to say the *ardās* on their behalf. There was an outburst of protest against this discrimination towards the so-called low-caste Sikhs. A compromise was at last reached and it was decided that the Guru's word be sought. The Guru Granth was, as is the custom, opened at random and the first verse on the page to be read was:

> He receives the lowly into grace, and puts them in the path of righteous service.
>
> Guru Granth, III, p. 638

The Guru's verdict was clearly in favour of those whom the clergy had refused to accept as full members of the community. This was a triumph for reformist Sikhs. The *karāhprasād* of the Mazhabī Sikhs was accepted. The congregation then marched towards Takht Akāl Bungā in front of the Harimandir. The priests deserted the Takht and the visiting pilgrims appointed a representative committee of twenty-five Sikhs for its management. The following day, the Deputy Commissioner nominated a separate committee of management consisting of nine members, all reformers, with the manager of the Golden Temple as president.

This was the beginning of the movement for the liberation of the *gurdwārās*. The Akālīs set afoot operations for retrieving their holy places from the control of the *mahants* or abbots. With a view to establishing a central committee of administration, a representative assembly of Sikhs from all walks of life was called by the new Jathedār (Provost) of Takht Akāl Bungā on November 15, 1920. Each delegate was required to satisfy five conditions, namely (a) that he had received *amrit*, the Sikh baptism; (b) that he was regular in reading the daily hymns; (c) that he kept the Sikh form and symbols; (d) that he was an early riser; and (e) that he gave regularly one-tenth of his earnings for common religious purposes.

Two days before the proposed conference, the government set up its own committee consisting of thirty-six Sikhs to manage the Golden Temple. This committee was nominated by the Lt-Governor of the Punjab at the instance of Mahārājā Bhūpendra Singh of Patiālā, who had been approached by Bhāī Jodh Singh and a few of his faculty colleagues at Khālsā College, Amritsar, to intervene between the government and the Sikhs. Among the members named were Sundar Singh Majīthīā, Raghbīr Singh Sandhānwālīā, Sohan Singh of Rāwalpindī, Bhāī Takht Singh, Bhāī Fateh Singh, Granthī, Srī Harimandir Sāhib, Kharak Singh, Indar Singh of Farīdkot, Bhāg Singh of Kalsīā, Mān Singh, Bhāī Jodh Singh, Ujjal Singh and Rājā Singh of Peshawar.

The Sikhs held their scheduled meeting on November 15, and formed a committee of 175, which was called the Shiromanī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee. In order to avoid conflict with the official committee and to render it ineffectual, they included its thirty-six members in the newly formed society.

The first session of the Shiromanī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee was held at Akāl Takht on December 12, 1920. To ensure that all members were good practising Sikhs, Panj Piāre, symbolizing the mystic entity of the Guru-Khālsā, were chosen to question each one of them on how faithfully he carried out the religious and social injunctions of his faith. The Panj Piāre chosen for the occasion were Bhāī Tejā Singh, a Harvard graduate, who was then running a Sikh school in the village of Mastūānā, Bhāī Jodh Singh, Principal, Guru Nānak College, Gujrānwālā, Bāwā Harkishan Singh, a professor at the Khālsā College at Amritsar, Bhāī Tejā Singh, of the Central Mājhā Dīwān, and Sardār Balwant Singh of Kullā. The members were taken to the first floor of the Akāl Takht where the enquiry was held. Each member had to satisfy the catechizers that he observed the Sikh discipline and that in his private or public conduct he had never diverged from standards laid down for a Sikh. Confessions were made and lapses admitted, with prompt undertaking to endure, in expiation, any punishment the *sangat* might prescribe. When the turn came of Sardār Sundar Singh Majīthīā, a leading Sikh of the day who had incurred the opposition of radical elements in the community owing to his

moderate views, the interrogation probed the motive of his public activities. He was asked to say, in the presence of the Guru Granth, whether as secretary of the Chief Khālsā Dīwān and as a representative of the Panth, he had been prompted in all he had done by the sole consideration of subserving the interests of the Sikhs. With perfect poise and dignity, Sardār Sundar Singh solemnly affirmed that the welfare of the community had always been the object nearest his heart and that he had never perjured his loyalty to the cause of the Panth by any thought of personal advantage. And yet with the humility characteristic of a true Sikh, he implored the indulgence of the liberal-hearted Khālsā, reciting the following hymn from the Guru Granth:

> Full of fault am I; there is not a single merit I possess. Forsaking the nectar of virtue, I quaff the poison of sin. Enticed by attachment, illusion and anxiousness, I am fettered by bonds of love for wife and son. But I have heard of a *panth* that is noble and of a *sangat* that is divine.
> Meeting them, all one's misgivings cease. I, Kīrat the bard, have only one supplication to make : Keep me ever in thy protection, Lord Rām Dās!
>
> Guru Granth, Kīrat, p. 1406

Then all of them, led by the Five Elect, clad in black with swords slung across their shoulders, came down singing the sacred hymns. The confessions of those who had erred on some detail of religious observance were recounted before the assembled *sangat*. The proceedings acquired the touch of drama when the words nobly spoken by Sardār Majīthīā and the *sabad* he had recited were quoted. The audience was moved to tears.

Sundar Singh Majīthīā was elected the first president of the Shiromanī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee, though he had to resign later to join the Punjab government as a member of the Governor's Executive Council. On April 30, 1921, the Shiromanī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee obtained legal sanction as a public body and elections were held in the month of July. The new committee at its first meeting at the Akāl Takht, on August 14, 1921, elected Sardār Kharak Singh president. Sardār Kharak Singh, who had a following among extremist sections of the community, also became president of the

Punjab Congress. On his arrest owing to his political affiliation, Amar Singh Jhabāl replaced him as head of the Shiromaṇī Committee.

The formation of the Shiromanī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee provided a focal point for the movement for the reformation of Sikh religious institutions and endowments. The *gurdwārās* began passing under its control one by one, but trouble arose where the priests were strongly entrenched or where the government actively helped them to resist mass pressure. At Tarn Tāran, near Amritsar, a batch of priests, drunk and bent on murder, attacked an unwary delegation of reformers, who had been invited to the shrine for negotiations. One of them, Hazārā Singh of Alādīnpur, who was a descendant of Baghel Singh, one of the Sikh Misl chiefs, fell a victim to priestly violence on January 20, 1921. He died the following day and became the first martyr to the cause of *gurdwārā* reform. Another Akālī, Hukam Singh of Vasāū Kot, succumbed to his injuries on February 4, 1921.

Nankānā Sāhib, the birthplace of Guru Nānak, was the scene of an outrage unparalleled for its calculated barbarity. Narain Dās, the wealthiest of *mahants*, had a most unsavoury reputation among Sikhs. His stewardship of the Nankānā Sāhib shrines had started many a scandal. There were charges of immorality and malversation against him. But he cared little for public opinion and sought to immunize himself against it by accumulating means for an armed showdown. He laid in a large amount of weapons and ammunition and hired nearly 400 assassins and desperadoes, who were kept on the *gurdwārā* premises. On the morning of February 20, 1921, as a *jathā* of 150 Sikhs came to make obeisance at the *gurdwārā*, the private army of Narain Dās fell upon them. The Sikhs were chanting the sacred hymns when the attack started. Bullets were mercilessly rained on them from the roofs of an adjoining building. Their leader, Bhāī Lachhman Singh, a tall and handsome Sikh from Dhārowāl, was struck down sitting in attendance of the Gurū Granth.

Outside the main gate, the *mahant*, pistol in hand and his face muffled up, pranced up and down on horseback directing the operations and all the time shouting, "Let not a single long-

haired Sikh go out alive." Bhāī Dalīp Singh, a much respected Sikh who was well known to the *mahant*, came to intercede with him to stop the bloody carnage. But the *mahant* answered him with a shot from his pistol, killing him instantaneously. Six other Sikhs coming from outside were butchered and thrown into a potter's kiln. Firewood and kerosene oil which had been stored in the *gurdwārā* were brought out and a fire lighted within the holy precincts. All the dead and injured were piled up on it and consumed by the flames. A few Sikhs were fastened to a tree near by and burnt alive.

News of the Nankānā massacres shocked the country. Sir Edward Maclagan, Governor of the Punjab, visited the place and was overwhelmed by emotion at the sight of the ghastly scene inside the temple. Mahatma Gandhi, along with Shaukat Ali and Muhammad Ali, the Muslim leaders, came a few days later. So did several other Congressmen. Princess Bamba Duleep Singh (1869-1957), daughter of Mahārājā Duleep Singh, came accompanied by Sir Jogendra Singh (1877-1946), to offer her homage to the memory of the martyrs.

The *mahant* and some of his hirelings were arrested and the possession of the shrine was made over by government to a committee of seven Sikhs headed by Sardār Harbans Singh of Attārī, vice-president of the Shiromanī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Commitee.

The Sikhs were deeply agonized to hear of the desecration of the holiest of their holy places and of the cruel and cold-blooded slaughter of so many of their brethren. Railway booking was stopped for Nankānā and all other stations within thirty-five kilometres of the town; yet thousands of Sikhs poured in from all sides. Their hearts bled to see the Guru Granth torn with rifle shots and the sacred sanctuary reeking of blood and smouldering flesh. Relations and friends pathetically looked over the charred figures to recognize their kith and kin. One old woman sat by a heap of ashes pressing the hand of a half-burnt body. This was one of her two brave sons who had fallen martyrs on the fateful morning of February 20.

February 23 was fixed for the cremation ceremony. Charred, mutilated bodies were collected and torn limbs and pieces of flesh picked from wherever they lay in the blood-stained chambers. A huge funeral pyre was erected. Bhāī Jodh Singh, in a

measured oration, advised the Sikhs to remain cool and patient and endure the calamity with the fortitude with which their ancestors had faced similar situations. The Sikhs, he said, had cleansed by their blood the holy precincts so long exposed to the vicious influence of a corrupt and impious regime.

By the atrocity they suffered at Nankānā Sāhib, the Sikhs added permanently a new passage to their *ardās*, or daily supplication, which contains an ennobling recital of their countless deeds of sacrifice and chivalry from the beginning of their history. As the Sikhs say *ardās* to invoke God's blessing, the martyrs of Nankānā are remembered in the following terms:

> . . . they who, to reform the *gurdwārās* and purge them of long-standing malpractices, suffered themselves to be shot, cut up, or burnt alive with kerosene oil, but did not make any resistance or utter a sigh of complaint—think of their patient faith and proclaim the name of God!

In spite of Sir Edward's visit to the site of the brutal crime, it soon became apparent that the bureaucracy in general had a sneaking sympathy with Narain Dās and his accomplices. The police assembled evidence for prosecution, lethargically. A strictly legalistic interpretation of the priests' rights over *gurdwārā* estates in their control became prevalent, disregarding the fact that they held these properties as trustees on behalf of the Sikh community. The government seemed determined to prevent Sikhs from taking over any more shrines, and detained a large number of the reformers. Jathedār Kartār Singh Jhabbar, who had got many *gurdwārās* released from the control of the *mahants*, was arrested and condemned to eighteen years' imprisonment. Another Akālī leader, Bhāī Tejā Singh Bhuchchar, was awarded a nine-year term.

A grave offence to Sikh sentiment was caused by the government taking away forcibly on November 7, 1921, the keys of the Golden Temple treasury. The Shiromanī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee protested strongly, and asked the Sikhs to hold assemblies to condemn the action of the government. Further means of recording resentment included a decision to observe a *hartāl* on the day the Prince of Wales, coming out on a tour, landed on Indian shores. Sikhs were forbidden to participate in

any function connected with the Prince's visit. To counteract the rising tide of indignation, the Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar convened meetings at his own house and in the villages to tell the people that the keys had been taken over only temporarily to institute a friendly case and obtain a legal verdict in favour of the reformers.

At a rival meeting the Sikhs held at Ajnālā, the Deputy Commissioner arrested some Sikh leaders, one of them, Harnām Singh Zaildār, for being "clad from head to foot in *khaddar*." Many more arrests were made, but the Sikhs came forth in still larger numbers. To fill the British gaols, batches of them marched in, draped in black and singing hymns, exhibiting standards of restraint and discipline hardly ever surpassed in a mass movement. Ex-servicemen threw up their pensions and joined Akālī ranks. Under pressure of the growing agitation, the government gave way. Their efforts to spot a Sikh who would agree to become manager of the Golden Temple and take hold of the keys having failed, the leaders of the Shiromanī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee were released unconditionally. Great was the Sikhs' joy when, at a huge gathering at the Akāl Takht on January 19, 1922, a court official representing the government surrendered the bunch of keys, wrapped in a piece of red cloth, to Sardār Kharak Singh, president of the Shiromanī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee. The air became thick with shouts of *satsrīakāl.* Throats were choked with emotions of humble gratitude as the thanksgiving-prayer was offered for the triumphant end of the issue.

At Guru-kā-Bāgh, twenty kilometres from Amritsar, Sikhs' capacity for suffering and resistance was put to further trial. Sundar Dās, the *mahant*, had by mutual negotiations made over the shrine to the Shiromanī Committee, taken the Sikh baptism and parted with his mistresses except one whom he honourably married. But he later repudiated part of the agreement, saying that, though he had surrendered the *gurdwārā* to the Shiromanī Committee, the piece of land known as Guru-kā-Bāgh attached to it was still his property. He objected to Sikhs cutting down trees on that land for the *langar*. The police, readily willing to oblige him, arrested on August 9, 1922, five Sikhs on charges of trespass. These arrests were made

not on Sundar Dās' complaint, but on a confidential report received by the police. The following day, the arrested Sikhs were hurriedly tried and sentenced to six months' rigorous imprisonment.

Undeterred by this action of the government, Sikhs continued the old practice of hewing wood from Guru-kā-Bāgh for the daily requirements of the community kitchen. The process of arrests and convictions proving of little avail, police tried a new technique to terrorize the reformers. Those who came to cut firewood from Guru-kā-Bāgh were beaten up in a merciless manner until they lay senseless on the ground. They were dragged about by their hair and left contemptuously off when the police thought they had been served well enough. The Sikhs suffered all this stoically and went in larger numbers day by day to submit themselves to the beating. From August 31, the number was raised to 100. Every day a batch of one hundred volunteers would start from the Akāl Takht pledged to silent suffering. The police would stop them on the way and smite them with heavy brass-bound sticks and rifle-butts. The belabouring continued until the batch lay prostrate to a man. The Sikhs displayed unique powers of self-control and resolution, and bore the bodily torment in a spirit of complete resignation. None of them winced or raised his hand. The Rev C.F. Andrews, who visited Amritsar, gave a graphic description of the passive resistance of the Akālīs in the account he wrote. He said, "... When I reached the Gurdwārā [at Guru-kā-Bāgh] itself, I was struck at once by the absence of excitement such as I had expected to find among so great a crowd of people.

"Close to the entrance there was a reader of the Scriptures who was holding a very large congregation of worshippers silent as they were seated on the ground before him. In another quarter there were attendants who were preparing the simple evening meal for the Gurdwārā guests by grinding the flour between two large stones. There was no sign that the actual beating had just begun and that the sufferers had already endured the shower of blows. But when I asked one of the passersby, he told me that the beating was now taking place. On hearing this news, I at once went forward. There were some hundreds present seated on an open piece of ground

watching what was going on in front, their faces strained with agony. I watched their faces first of all, before I turned the corner of a building and reached a spot where I could see the beating itself. There was not a cry raised from the spectators, but the lips of very many of them were moving in prayer.

". . . There were four Akālī Sikhs with their black turbans facing a band of about a dozen policemen, including two English officers. They had walked slowly up to the line of the police just before I had arrived and they were standing silently in front of them at about a yard's distance. They were perfectly still and did not move further forward. Their hands were placed together in prayer and it was clear that they were praying. Then, without the slightest provocation on their part, an Englishman lunged forward the head of his *lāthī* which was bound with brass. He lunged it forward in such a way that his fist which held the staff struck the Akālī Sikh, who was praying, just at the collar-bone with great force. It looked the most cowardly blow as I saw it struck....

"The blow which I saw was sufficient to fell the Akālī Sikh and send him to the ground. He rolled over, and slowly got up once more, and faced the same punishment over again. Time after time one of the four who had gone forward was laid prostrate by repeated blows, now from the English officer and now from the police who were under his control. The others were knocked out more quickly. On this and on subsequent occasions the police committed certain acts which were brutal in the extreme. I saw with my own eyes one of these police kick in the stomach of a Sikh who stood helplessly before him. It was a blow so foul that I could hardly restrain myself from crying out aloud and rushing forward. But later on I was to see another act which was, if anything, even fouler still. For when one of the Akālī Sikhs had been hurled to the ground and was lying prostrate, a police sepoy stamped with his foot upon him, using his full weight; the foot struck the prostrate man between the neck and the shoulder....

"The brutality and inhumanity of the whole scene was indescribably increased by the fact that the men who were hit were praying to God and had already taken a vow that they would remain silent and peaceful in word and deed....

"There has been something far greater in this event than a

mere dispute about land and property. It has gone far beyond the technical questions of legal possession or distraint. A new heroism, learnt through suffering, has arisen in the land. A new lesson in moral warfare has been taught to the world....

"One thing I have not mentioned which was significant of all that I have written concerning the spirit of the suffering endured. It was very rarely that I witnessed any Akālī Singh, who went forward to suffer, flinch from a blow when it was struck. Apart from the instinctive and involuntary reaction of the muscles that has the appearance of a slight shrinking back, there was nothing, so far as I can remember, that could be called a deliberate avoidance of the blows struck. The blows were received one by one without resistance and without a sign of fear."

The Governor of the Punjab visited Amritsar on September 13, 1922, and stopped the beating of Sikh volunteers. Arrests began to be made instead. At the government announcement that preparations were being made to accommodate ten thousand Akālīs in gaols, the Sikhs stepped up their campaign. *Jathās* grew larger in size. The government at last gave in. The good offices of Sir Gangā Rām, a rich and influential citizen of Lahore, were secured. On November 16, 1922, he obtained the Guru-kā-Bāgh land on lease from the *mahant* and wrote to government that he required no police protection. The government had the excuse not to interfere with the Sikhs who could now go unmolested to Guru-kā-Bāgh to cut wood in the jungle. The Sikhs' gain was not confined merely to the immediate point involved. The moral implication of the issue was far more important.

But the Sikhs' trials were not yet ended. For protesting against the deposition of the Sikh Mahārājā of Nābhā, known for his sympathy with the Akālīs and other nationalist elements, the Shiromanī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee was, on October 13, 1923, declared an unlawful association by government. All its leaders and active members were arrested and tried on charges of sedition against the King. But the Shiromanī Committee continued with redoubled zeal the agitation for the restoration of its D.D. [Dehrā Dūn] friend—

abbreviatian by which Mahārājā Ripudaman Singh of Nābhā was referred to in its secret documents.

The small town of Jaitu, in Nābhā state, became the scene of another prolonged and dramatic struggle. Here in a *gurdwārā* a whole batch of Akālī worshippers was arrested and the *akhand pāth* or continuous reading of the Guru Granth they had inaugurated was interrupted. This aggravated the situation. To vindicate their right to worship in the *gurdwārā* and to redeem the impiety committed by the police, batches of twenty-five Akālīs began to issue daily from the Akāl Takht to march on foot to Jaitu, which was 190 kilometres from Amritsar. Before they reached Jaitu, these *jathās* were held by police, beaten up and taken to a remote desert some 500 kilometres away, there to be abandoned to their fate without food or money.

Jawaharlal Nehru, then a rising star in the Indian National Congress, wished to find out what was happening at Jaitu and came accompanied by two of his colleagues, K. Santhanam and A.T. Gidwani. He followed, in a country cart, one of the *jathās*. As they reached Jaitu, the *jathā* was stopped by police and an order was served upon Jawaharlal Nehru and his companions banning their entry into Nābhā territory. Upon their refusing compliance, they were put under arrest (September 21, 1923) and marched through the streets of the town, Jawaharlal Nehru and K. Santhanam handcuffed together, the former's right wrist tied with the left of the latter. Describing accused Jawaharlal Nehru in his diary, in memorable constabulary prose, the subordinate, but obviously imaginative, Nābhā policeman wrote: "*Gorā rang, lambūtrā chehrā, aust andām, lambā nāk, āhū chashm, farākh peshānī, qadd darmiānā, umar chauntīs sāl* (Fair complexion, oval face, average build, long nose, gazelle-eyed, broad forehead, medium height, age 34 years)."

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was sentenced to two years' imprisonment, rigorous for one year and simple for the other, on charges of conspiracy. There was an additional six-month term for defiance of the entry ban. According to the law in Nābhā, there should have been at least four persons to make a conspiracy against the state. In order to make up the required number, the authorities entangled Darbārā Singh of Mallan,

who was not with the group but had accompanied it part of the way through the villages of Ferozepore district.

After some time larger batches, each 500 strong, began to be sent from Amritsar. The first of these left the Takht Akāl Bungā on February 9, 1924, led by Jathedār Ūdham Singh of Gohalwar-Varpāl. The news of the *jathā* marching on foot from Amritsar to Jaitu caused much excitement in the countryside. Dr Saif-ud-Dīn Kitchlew, a Congress leader, and a foreign journalist, S. Zimand of the *New York Times*, accompanied it as observers. At Jaitu, the *jathā* was fired upon (February 21, 1924), but the Sikhs marched on in face of the shower of bullets. Twenty-one of them fell under fire, besides many wounded. Yet the *jathā* moved on undeterred, and reached Gurdwārā Tibbī Sāhib. Here the *jathā* was beaten by police and taken into custody.

Fifteen more *jathās* went to Jaitu. The authorities finally gave in and the last *jathā* was allowed to reach its destination. The Punjab government had made up its mind to let the Sikhs take over management of their shrines. The Sikh Gurdwārās Act was placed on the Statute Book on July 25, 1925. A central Gurdwārā Board, elected by the Sikhs, was to be the custodian of all important Sikh places of worship. The first Gurdwārā Board passed a resolution that its designation be changed to Shiromanī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee. This was accepted by the government.

At the time of the Akālī movement arose a terrorist group which had little faith in non-violence. The Nankānā happenings had deeply hurt the Sikhs. Some of them suspected the British hand behind them. At the time of the Sikh Educational Conference at Hoshiārpur from March 19-21, 1921, some extremists led by Master Motā Singh and Kishan Singh Gargajj of the village of Baring, in the Doābā, held a secret meeting. They made up a plan to avenge themselves upon those responsible for the killings at Nankānā. Their first target was Mr Bowring, the superintendent of police at Lahore. The men named for the task were arrested on May 23, 1921. Warrants were issued against Master Motā Singh and Kishan Singh as well, but both of them went underground and evaded arrest.

In November 1921, Kishan Singh formed a secret

organization called Chakravartī Jathā. In August 1922, the Chakravartī Jathā converted itself into Babar Akālī Jathā, with Kishan Singh as the Jathedār. A cyclostyled paper called *Babar Akāli Doābā* had already been launched. Contacts were sought to be established with soldiers and students. The main object of the Jathā was the *sudhār* (reformation)—a euphemism for liquidation—of *jholīchuks* (literally, robe-bearers, i.e. British stooges and informers). The members were (1) to recite *gurbānī* daily; (2) not to indulge in personal vendetta against anyone; (3) not to molest any woman nor to lift any cash or goods other than those expressly permitted by the organization; and (4) to obey the commands of the organization at all costs.

The movement was very active from mid-1922 to the end of 1923. Several English officers and their Indian informers were killed by the Babars. But the Akālī Dal and the Shiromanī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee did not subscribe to violence. The isolated group of the Babar Akālīs was broken up by government repression. A large number of them were arrested. The trial began inside Lahore central gaol on August 15, 1923. Of the 91 accused, two died in gaol during trial, 34 were acquitted, six, including Jathedār Kishan Singh, were awarded death penalty, and the remaining 49 were sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment. One who died in action was Babar Dhannā Singh (1888-1923) of Bahibalpur. One Jawālā Singh, in collusion with a police sub-inspector, lured him to the village of Mannanhānā, in Hoshiārpur district, where Mr Horton, the British superintendent of police, and his party were waiting. Dhannā Singh was overpowered by the police. Showing remarkable presence of mind, he had his hand released with a sudden jerk and crashed into one of the officers holding him. This provided sufficient force to detonate the bombs which he was carrying hidden round his waist. The British superintendent and five other police officers were killed in the explosion, besides Dhannā Singh himself.

In the Akālī agitation for Gurdwārā reform nearly forty thousand went to gaol and four hundred lost their lives. Sums to the tune of sixteen lakhs of rupees were paid by way of fines and forfeitures and about seven hundred Sikh government functionaries in the villages were deprived of their positions.

The constitution of the Shiromanī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee has undergone several changes since the passing of the Gurdwārās Act. By an amendment carried in the Punjab Legislative Assembly in 1944, provision was made for the representation of Sikh backward classes who had twelve seats reserved for them. The total strength of the house was raised from 151 to 166. One of the amendments provided for greater centralization of power and removed some of the restrictions on the use of funds for educational and missionary purposes. It gave the Shiromanī Committee direct control of *gurdwārās* such as Nankānā Sāhib, Tarn Tāran, Anandpur Sāhib and Muktsar. Formerly every Sikh adult, man or woman, had the right to vote. Certain conditions demanding fulfilment of religious duties were now imposed. Further amendments were necessitated in 1956 by the merger with the Punjab of the state of PEPSU. The jurisdiction of the Shiromanī Committee was extended to the territories of the former ruling princes of the Punjab.

With the statutory sanction it has and with the provision of periodical elections duplicating in every detail parliamentary processes, the Shiromanī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee is a unique ecclesiastical institution. Although it is meant for purely religious purposes, the electoral procedure governing its structure imparts to its affairs a permanent political interest and makes it liable to factional antagonisms.

CHAPTER XXI

JUGGERNAUT OF RISING COMMUNALISM

If the Singh Sabhā fixed the religious custom of the Sikhs, the Akālī movement determined their political style. The former led to the cleansing of their faith, and the latter demonstrated to them their capacity for mass action. Under the impact of the Singh Sabhā, Sikhism finally broke away from the extrinsic influences which had gained ascendancy in the preceding half-century or so, and recovered its original simplicity and dynamism. Norms of religious belief and practice then established have since prevailed and are subscribed to by the majority of the Sikh community today. They are basically so liberal and so true to the essentials of Sikh teaching that no revision or recension seems likely to be called for, for a long time to come.

The reformation of Sikh shrines which began with the Singh Sabhā was completed by the Akālī movement. In the process of gaining liberation of the *gurdwārās*, the latter turned into a campaign against the government in which political feeling became as strong as the religious feeling. A new consciousness grew among the Sikhs. The attitudes formed in the days of the Akālī struggle have been the dominant factors in conditioning the political behaviour of the Sikhs. Men who had had their first experience of public affairs as leaders of the Akālī movement continued to hold sway, some in the native sphere of Sikh politics and others in the larger political organizations such as the Indian National Congress and the Communist Party of India which they subsequently joined. The general awakening brought about by the Akālī campaign strengthened the national movement in India. The Sikhs themselves played in it a leading role.

The Indian Muslims' demand for the recognition of their separate political entity was a severe challenge to the Sikhs' position in the Punjab. The Muslims had, in fact, been deliberately encouraged to take an independent course to provide a counterpoise to Congress policies. In Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), the founder of the Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh, which later developed into Muslim University, the British had an ally who lent his commanding influence to preaching the gospel of loyalty among his co-religionists. He was initially a believer in the common nationality of all Indians irrespective of class and creed, and had once walked out of a government *daṛbār* at Agra as a protest against the discriminatory treatment offered to Indians. But he subsequently swung over to an aggressively communal posture, and opened a campaign against the Indian National Congress with a speech at Lucknow on December 18, 1887. His primary aim was to win the Muslims reprieve for their part in the mutiny of 1857 and to secure for them preference in the matter of government employment. At the instance of Mr Beck, the British principal of Aligarh College, Sir Syed set up, in 1888, the United Patriotic Association, with the object of opposing the Congress. A branch of this Association functioned in London in the home of Mr Morrison, who became the principal of Aligarh College after Beck. In 1893, Sir Syed established the Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental Defence Association of Upper India, with its membership open to Muslims and Englishmen.

Another European principal of Aligarh College, Mr Archbold, arranged for a delegation of the Muslims to wait upon Lord Minto, the Governor-General, to urge the special claims of their community and to demand separate electoral representation for it in the institutions of self-government. Conscious of his proficiency in "the art of drawing up petitions in good language," Archbold offered to prepare the address to be presented to the Governor-General on behalf of the Muslims. He had made sure through Colonel Dunlop Smith, Private Secretary to Lord Minto, that such a deputation would be welcomed by the Governor-General. On October 1, 1906, spokesmen of the Muslim community, led by His Highness the Āgā Khān, met Lord Minto at Simla. In his reply to the deputationists' address, the latter fully endorsed their views and said:

> Your address, as I understand it, is a claim that, in any system of representation, whether it affects a Municipality, a District, or Legislative Council, in which it is proposed to introduce or increase an electoral organization, the Mohammadan community should be represented as a community. . . . I am entirely in accord with you . . . . I am as firmly convinced as I believe you to be, that any electoral representation in India would be doomed to mischievous failure which aimed at granting a personal enfranchisement, regardless of the beliefs and traditions of communities composing the population of this continent.

This unequivocal statement by the British Governor-General was an open incitement to Muslim separatism. The seeds of Hindu-Muslim dissension were thus carefully sown. Lady Minto, wife of the Governor-General, called the eventful day "an epoch in Indian history." To consolidate the communal opinion, All-India Muslim Conference was founded in the year of the Deputation. This organization was subsequently converted into the All-India Muslim League, which eventually had the country cut in twain on religious basis.

The government set its seal on Muslim communalism by introducing separate electorates under the Minto-Morley Reforms of 1909, and by giving weighted representation to Muslims in provinces in which they were in a minority. The adoption of this divisive principle created a permanent cleavage between Hindus and Muslims. In 1916, the Congress attempted to appease the Muslim League by conceding its communal claims and contracting with it an agreement which is known as the Lucknow Pact. By this covenant, the Muslims had their representation in the various legislative councils specified. In the Punjab, they were to have through their own exclusive electorate 50 per cent of the Council seats. The Sikhs, who were an influential community in the region and had important interests at stake, were completely ignored in this League-Congress compact. The Punjab was the only province in India where they had a sizable population. Here in their own homeland they were condemned to perpetual subordination to the Muslims who, under the patronage of the British, gradually came to have a position of vantage in the administration of the province.

The Sikhs' representation in the legislative bodies had been negligible since the introduction of reforms under the Minto-

Morley scheme. In 1909, for instance, all the three Punjab seats for the Imperial Legislative Council open to election were carried by Muslims. In 1912, Sikhs gained one seat out of 6; in 1916, none out of 11.

By virtue of their comparatively high educational level and economic position, they had proportionately the largest share in the franchise, but this advantage was neutralized by the statutory provision giving the Muslims exclusive representation by reserving seats for them in the Council. The provision made for the Muslims was denied to the Sikhs who were practically excluded from the legislative and executive spheres. To be left out of the arrangements devised at Lucknow in 1916 was a further setback to their interests and an injury to their self-respect.

Finding themselves reduced to a state of political inferiority, the Sikhs began to press for their own rights. They demanded to be treated in the Punjab the same way as the Muslims were treated in provinces where they were in a minority. Their viewpoint was ventilated by the Chief Khālsā Dīwān, then their principal organized party.

Sardār Sundar Singh Majīthīā, the secretary of the Dīwān, wrote a letter to the chief secretary of the Punjab government on December 26, 1916, setting out the claims of the Sikh community for representation in the Imperial and Provincial councils. He said:

> In order that such representation be adequate and effective and consistent with their position and importance, the Sikhs claim that a one-third share in all seats and appointments in the Punjab is their just share and should be secured to them as their absolute minimum.

In 1917, when Edwin Samuel Montagu succeeded Sir Austen Chamberlain as the Secretary of State for India, the introduction of responsible government in India was declared to be the goal of British policy. Montagu visited India soon after. He and the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, prepared a report which they jointly signed. The joint report, published in July 1918, proposed to extend to the Sikhs the system adopted in the case of Muslims in provinces where they formed a minority. To

consider the report, the Chief Khālsā Dīwān convened a representative conclave of the Sikhs at Amritsar on September 18, 1918. In the memorandum which was prepared on behalf of the community, government was urged to carry out the assurance given the Sikhs.

The question of Sikh representation was raised in the Punjab Legislative Council when the report came up for discussion before it. To baulk the Sikhs, the Muslim leader, Sir Fazl-i-Husain, moved a resolution proposing that the proportion of Muslims in the Punjab Legislative Council as laid down in the Congress-League scheme be maintained. To this the Sikh representative, Sardār Gajjan Singh of Ludhiānā, moved an amendment recommending the addition of the words, "subject to the just claims of the Sikhs." The amendment was opposed by Muslims as well as by Hindus. The unreasonable attitude of Hindu and Muslim members evoked a sharp rebuke from the Speaker of the House, who said:

> I am going to make a sort of an appeal to you. I want you to remember one of the charges brought against Indian public men. One of the reasons which has always been advanced for not giving them the management of their own affairs is that whenever sectarian questions are raised they find it impossible to be reasonable, or to agree in any way, and therefore it is necessary for us impartial people to step in and decide questions which the people have shown themselves incapable of deciding for themselves. Now if you are willing on this important occasion which necessarily goes to form part of the history of this country, if you are willing to leave on the minds of all the impression that you have shown yourselves unable to come to any agreement on this question, then you will have condemned yourselves, and you will have justified those among ourselves who contend that Indians are really not fit to manage their own affairs because they cannot consider sectarian questions in an unbiased spirit. I appeal to you, therefore, in your own interest not to allow such an impression as this to gain ground.
>
> It is perfectly obvious that if this amendment of Sardar Gajjan Singh is laid before this Council, simply because there are only two Sikhs, it will be lost. Nevertheless, it is equally obvious that, whatever it may be in form, it is in substance and spirit a perfectly just and fair claim. I ask you what will be the impression if a claim ust and fair in substance but not in form has been rejected by a majority of the Indian members.

The Speaker's advice was rejected and the amendment thrown out, with only the Sikh members voting for it.

The publication of the Montagu-Chelmsford report was followed by the appointment of Franchise Committee, under the chairmanship of Lord Southborough, to go into the matter of the composition of the new legislatures. It contained three Indian members, but none of them was a Sikh. When the Sikhs protested, Sardār Sundar Singh Majīthīā was taken as a co-opted member for the Punjab, but their demand for one-third of the total number of non-official seats held by Indians in the Punjab, 7 out of 67 non-official seats in the Assembly of India and 4 seats in the Council of State for the Sikh community remained largely unfulfilled. The Franchise Committee recommended 15 per cent Council seats for the Sikhs. In Bihar and Orissa where they formed no more than 10 per cent of the total population, the Muslims were given 25 per cent seats by the Franchise Committee. In the Punjab where they constituted 12 per cent of the population and were otherwise an important factor in the life of the province, Sikhs' share was fixed at a bare 15 per cent.

To get this invidious distinction rectified, the Sikhs made representations to the government. A deputation, consisting of Sardār Sewārām Singh, Sardār Shivdev Singh Uberoi, Sardār Sohan Singh of Rāwalpindī and Sardār Ujjal Singh was sent to England in 1920 to place the Sikhs' case before the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Indian Reforms, but nothing availed. Meanwhile, the Akālī campaign for the reform of Sikh religious places had started and the Sikhs had begun taking an active part in the national struggle for freedom. To keep them from joining the mass non-cooperation launched by the National Congress in 1920, 33 per cent share of legislative seats and a Sikh university had been offered by the government, with the further concession of setting free Sikhs arrested in connection with the Ghadr movement of 1914-15. But the Sikhs refused to be allured, and the Sikh League adopted at its Lahore session the non-cooperation resolution.

Though they were the smallest minority in the Punjab, the Sikhs were generally averse to the principle of communal representation. The Muslims, in spite of being in a majority, had been given statutory protection and weightage in the form of

separate electorates and reservation of seats. This created among the Sikhs a sense of grievance and they demanded to be treated on a par with the Muslims in the matter of political rights. They, otherwise, stood for a united Indian nationhood and were willing to compete with the others on merit rather than depend on any concessions and privileges statutorily guaranteed. In its memorandum to the Royal Indian Statutory Committee of 1928, the Chief Khālsā Dīwān observed:

> While anxious to maintain their individuality as a separate community, they [Sikhs] are always ready to co-operate with their sister communities for the development of a united nation. They would, therefore, be the first to welcome a declaration that no considerations of caste or religion shall affect the matter of organization of a national government in the country. They are prepared to stand on merit alone, provided they, in common with others, are permitted to grow, unhampered by any other community. Some other communities, however, still seem to persist, in one form or other, for the recognition of religious factions in the constitution of the country, and, if their claims are recognized and creed forms an integral part of the basis of representation in the administration of the country, the Sikhs apprehend danger to their very existence, unless adequate safeguards are provided for them. The tyranny of majority is an expression not wholly unknown in the political history of the world, and when such majority is based on religion, the extent to which such tyranny might go is unlimited . . . . It has already been mentioned that the Sikhs, in spite of being the smallest of three communities in the Punjab, are prepared to forgo all communal representation if this can be knocked out of the constitution of the country.

Among the reforms suggested by the Chief Khālsā Dīwān were the abolition of communal representation, entrusting the legislature with full control over finance and subordinating the executive and bureaucracy to its will.

Advanced by a party known to be moderate in politics and claiming to speak on behalf of a minority religious group, these were highly enlightened proposals. They also revealed the direction of Sikh political thinking at that time. But affairs in the country had acquired an irredeemable communal bias. With the Muslims fanatically attached to the notion of a separate political destiny, the cleavage between the two major communities

widened. Attempts at bringing about Hindu-Muslim concord produced only contrary results.

Accepting the challenge of Lord Birkenhead, the Secretary of State for India, to work out a scheme of government acceptable to all, a conference of different parties called by the Congress appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Pandit Motilal Nehru. The Committee prepared an exhaustive report which was published in August 1928. But Muslim opinion expressed itself strongly against the proposals made in the Nehru Report. When the conference met again in Calcutta on December 22, 1928, to discuss it, Mr Mohammad Ali Jinnah suggested a number of amendments on behalf of the Muslims. Upon these proposals being voted down, the Muslims held a meeting in Delhi under the chairmanship of the Āgā Khān and drew up a charter of demands the acceptance of which was made a condition for their agreeing to any new constitution for the country.

The Sikhs rejected the Nehru Report for different reasons. Giving his presidential address *extempore* at the annual session of the Sikh League at Gujrānwālā on October 22, 1928, Bābā Kharak Singh said that the Report had sinned against the self-respect and dignity of India by limiting the national objective to Dominion Status. This meant that the people would have to fight twice over—first, to win Dominion Status and then, Swarāj. The second point of Bābā Kharak Singh's criticism was that the Nehru Report had laid the foundation of communalism by accepting separate electorates. Giānī Sher Singh sponsored the principal resolution castigating the Report for acquiescing in the communal representation. The resolution advocated a system of joint electorates with plural constituencies, adding that, if community-wise representation became inevitable, the Sikhs should have at least 30 per cent of the seats in the Punjab legislature and the same proportion of the representation from the Punjab to the Central legislature. Among other speakers were Sardār Sant Singh of Lyallpur, Sardār Amar Singh Jhabāl and Sardār Būtā Singh, Advocate. Sardār Mangal Singh, who was a signatory to the Nehru Report, told the conference that he had urged upon the committee that either communal representation be discarded altogether or that the Sikhs' share be fixed at 30 per cent. Master Tārā Singh said that the Sikhs wanted

neither British *rāj* nor Muslim. He declared that, while working with the Congress, he would not flinch from laying down his life to secure the Sikhs their rights. The original resolution, disapproving of the Nehru Report and its goal of Dominion Status and demanding 30 per cent seats for the Sikhs in case separate electorates were adopted, was carried by a large majority.

Similar was again the temper of speeches made by Sikh leaders at their political conference which opened in Lahore, outside the Fort, on December 30, 1929. The conference coincided with the forty-fourth session of the Indian National Congress which had commenced its sittings on December 29, 1929, in Lājpat Nagar, Lahore, under the presidentship of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Bābā Kharak Singh, who presided over the Sikh conference, reiterated the Sikhs' determination not to let any single community establish its political hegemony in the Punjab. The Sikhs, he said, had suffered more than any other community in the cause of Indian freedom. Of the 31 Indian patriots sentenced to death, 27 were Sikhs, and of the 121 sentenced to long imprisonment, 91 were Sikhs. Bābā Kharak Singh concluded by saying that their first concern was to make the country independent and self-governing. To be self-governing Indians must first organize themselves into a nation, throw off all communal differences and become one in mind and heart. The resolution finally passed demanded that, if communal representation was to continue, Sikhs should get 30 per cent share of the legislative seats in the Punjab, with adequate provisions for the protection of their rights in other provinces.

The Sikh conference, and even more dramatically, the huge Sikh march which preceded it, made a tremendous impact. Congress leaders led by Mahatma Gandhi, came to meet Bābā Kharak Singh and his colleagues in the local office of the Shiromanī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee. They gave Sikh leaders the assurance that no political arrangement which did not give them full satisfaction would be accepted by the Congress.

The Muslims maintained their attitude of sullenness. Their Delhi demands became the basis of their separate political platform. After President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, they were known as Jinnah's Fourteen Points. Muslim exclusiveness

was intensified by Jinnah's calculated and relentless reiteration of his demand for sectarian electorates and reservations. Uncompromising stubbornness and the desire to dictate terms were apparent in his attitude towards the Congress. All efforts at intercommunal settlement failed because of the Muslim League's ever-stiffening, supercilious attitude. The Hindu-Muslim division took a worse turn and violence broke out between the two communities on the slightest pretext. Incidents occurred at Bombay, Kanpur and other places. Wherever they could intervene effectively, the Sikhs exercised their influence on the side of restraint and harmony. Their peaceable role at the time of the communal outbreak at Amritsar in 1922 had been widely appreciated in those days of severe tension. Even the Punjab government had acknowledged it by ordering the release of 1,400 Akālīs gaoled in the Guru-kā-Bāgh campaign.

Parties in India failing to produce a commonly agreed solution, the British government invited representatives of different groups and interests to meet at a Round Table Conference in London. The first of a series of such conferences was held in November 1930. The Sikhs were represented by Sardār Ujjal Singh and Sardār Sampūran Singh. To the second Round Table Conference, which was attended by Mahatma Gandhi as the sole representative of the Congress, Sikhs sent the same two delegates. The government set up a Minorities Committee to deal with the question of communal representation. But agreement eluded the leaders and the proceedings were deadlocked owing, once again, to the Muslims' refusal to accept joint citizenship with the rest of the nation. Edward Thompson, in his book *Enlist India for Freedom*, said:

> During the Round Table Conference there was rather an obvious understanding and alliance between the more intransigent Muslims and certain particularly undemocratic British political circles. That alliance is constantly asserted in India to be the real block to progress. I believe I could prove that this is largely true. And there is no question that in former times we frankly practised 'divide and rule' method in India. From Warren Hastings' time onwards, men made no bones of the pleasure the Hindu-Muslim conflict gave them; even such men as Elphinstone and Malcolm and Metcalfe admitted its value to the British.

In the absence of a mutually agreed intercommunal formula, the British government undertook to settle the question for India. On August 16, 1932, the Prime Minister, Ramsay Macdonald, made his announcement which came to be known as the Communal Award. In this award the communal demands of the Muslims as embodied in M.A. Jinnah's Fourteen Points were conceded. They were accorded separate electorates and reservation of seats in the provincial legislatures. The proposed autonomy for the provinces envisaged a weak central set-up which was precisely what the Muslims had wanted. Separate electorates were provided for Sikhs, Europeans, Indian Christians and Anglo-Indians. But the Sikhs' position in the Punjab remained insecure. As a minority, they were not given weightage commensurate with their importance in the province or with the proportion allowed to the Muslims in provinces where they were in a minority. They were in consequence left helpless against a communal majority statutorily vested with permanent authority in the Punjab. In protest, Sardār Ujjal Singh and Sardār Sampūran Singh resigned their membership of the Round Table Conference. Sardār Ujjal Singh also dissociated himself from the Consultative Committee headed by the Governor-General. The Government filled the Sikh vacancies on the Round Table Conference by its own nominees—Sardār Tārā Singh, a judge of the Patiālā High Court, and Sardār Būtā Singh of Sheikhūpurā. To prevent the former from proceeding to London, Giānī Sher Singh and other leaders of the Central Sikh League tried to abduct him at the Rājpurā railway station, *en route* to Bombay, from where he was to sail for England. But he forestalled the move and did reach London as scheduled. At the Conference, however, he supported the nationalist standpoint and sided with Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru on all political and constitutional issues.

The British government's impending pronouncement was awaited by the Sikhs with apprehension. They had a premonition that the government verdict would be weighted in favour of the Muslims. They called on July 24, 1932, at the *samādh* of Mahārājā Ranjīt Singh in Lahore, a general convention representing different shades of opinion in the community. Sardār Amar Singh (1888-1948), senior vice-president of the Central Sikh League, who was voted to the chair, said in his opening

speech that Sikhs demanded only justice for themselves. They paid the largest part of the revenue of the province and contributed proportionately a higher quota to the Indian army. They were by all criteria entitled to the same weightage and concessions in the Punjab as were being given to Muslims in provinces where they were in a minority. Giānī Gurmukh Singh Musāfir (1899-1976), then Jathedār of Srī Akāl Takht, declared that an arrangement which condemned the Sikhs to a subordinate position in the Punjab would not be acceptable to them. Giānī Kartār Singh (1902-74) read out the message of Master Tārā Singh (1885-1967), who was putting up at a distance of about five kilometres from the site of the conference, his entry into the districts of Lahore, Amritsar and Lyallpur having been barred. Giānī Sher Singh (1884-1944), vice-president of the Central Sikh League, introduced the major resolution with a stirring oration. Sardār Bhāg Singh, speaking on behalf of the Shiromanī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee, supported it. The convention pledged itself to resisting the establishment of a Muslim-majority rule in the Punjab on the basis of a communal electorate. A Council of Action comprising sixteen members, namely Bābā Kharak Singh (then in gaol), Master Tārā Singh, Giānī Sher Singh, Giānī Kartār Singh, Sardār Amar Singh, editor of the *Sher-i-Punjab*, Sardār Sundar Singh Majīthīā, Sardār Ujjal Singh, Sardār Bahādur Mehtāb Singh, Sardār Sampūran Singh, Sardār Būtā Singh of Sheikhūpurā, Sardār Mohinder Singh Siddhwān, Sardār Bhāg Singh, Sardār Sant Singh, the Sardār Sāhib of Kot Fatūhī, Sardār Avtār Singh, Barrister, and the President of the Shiromanī Akālī Dal, was constituted.

The Council was authorized to co-opt two additional members to make up a total of eighteen. Turn by turn, ten of the nominees, who were present at the meeting, vowed in front of the Guru Granth to oppose any political arrangement which established in the Punjab the ascendancy of any one single religious community. The meeting asked the Sikhs in general to hold special continuous readings of the Guru Granth in the *gurdwārās* and repeat the pledge at the concluding ceremonies on July 31. On August 14, 1932, a meeting of the Sikh Council of Action took place at Mahārājā Ranjit Singh's *samādh*, under the presidentship of Sardār Amar Singh. One of the objects of

the meeting was to reprimand the Sikh leaders who had, without authority from the Council, gone to Simla to participate in the negotiations for a Sikh-Muslim *rapprochement*. How universally were the Sikhs affected will be borne out by the tone of a letter four Sikh aristocrats, Sir Sundar Singh Majīthīā, Sir Jogendra Singh, Rājā Sir Daljīt Singh and Sardār Sohan Singh, sent to the British government through the Lt-Governor of the Punjab. The venerable *sardārs*, far from being radical by conviction or impulsive by temperament, said that the Sikhs would not consider any sacrifice too great to ensure for themselves an honourable place in the future political structure in the country.

The British award confirmed the worst fears of the Sikhs. The Muslims were given a clear statutory majority in the Punjab legislature and, thereby, the authority to govern the province as a communal group. The Sikhs summoned another large assembly which met at the Akāl Takht, in Amritsar, on September 25, 1932, and decided by unanimous vote to set up an association by the name of Khālsā Darbār to thwart the enforcement of what came to be known as the Communal Award. The Shiromanī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee registered its protest at a meeting of the general house held in the Town Hall, in Amritsar, on June 18, 1933, and reiterated the Sikhs' resolve not to submit to the constitutional arrangement envisaged under the Award. The Central Sikh League and the Khālsā Darbār passed a resolution in their joint meeting in Lahore on October 16, 1933, pressing for its revocation.

To minimize communal antagonisms and to produce a formula in substitution of the Award given by the British, a Unity Conference was called at Allahabad on November 3, 1932. The Conference, which was attended by 63 Hindus, 11 Sikhs, 39 Muslims and 8 Indian Christians, was making good progress when Sir Samuel Hoare made a sudden announcement declaring that His Majesty's government had decided to reserve for Muslims a 33.3 per cent share in the Central legislature. This was slightly in excess of what was mutually agreed upon by the Indian leaders then deliberating at Allahabad. The concession was tempting enough to wean the Muslims away from the Unity Conference which broke up infructuously like several of its predecessors.

The Communal Award became once again the central theme of Indian politics. The Muslims felt reassured by the special rights and concessions it afforded them. The Hindus were naturally hostile but the Congress, in view of the divergence of opinion between the two communities, adopted an attitude of neutrality. In a meeting at Bombay in October 1934, it declared that it neither accepted nor rejected the Award. The Sikhs, who felt gravely slighted and considered the Communal Award a menace to their existence, were its bitterest opponents, and they never slackened the vigorous campaign they had launched against it. But they were numerically too few to have their protest fully heeded. Finally, Parliament set its seal on the Communal Award by passing the Government of India Act of 1935.

The Federal part of the reforms being held over till a greater measure of unanimity in Indian opinion was achieved, elections to the provincial assemblies took place under the new Act in the winter of 1936-37. The Congress secured majorities in seven of the eleven provinces. The Muslim League fared badly. It was routed in the provinces which were predominantly Muslim. In Sind and the North-West Frontier Province not a single seat went to the League; in the Punjab its share was a solitary one.

The Sikhs, whose interests were principally identified with the Punjab, came to be divided into two groups. The Shiromanī Akālī Dal, which represented the common masses, collaborated with the Congress. But it encountered unexpectedly tough opposition from the moderate elements which were joined into a forceful alliance by two knighted *sardārs*, Sundar Singh Majīthīā and Jogendra Singh. The new organization, called the Khālsā National Party, supported by such veteran fighters as Giānī Sher Singh, Sardār Amar Singh of the *Sher-i-Punjab* and Sardār Mangal Singh, won more than half of the Sikh seats from the Akālīs. The Muslim-dominated Unionist Party which formed the government in the Punjab gained the co-operation of the Khālsā National Party whose leader, Sir Sundar Singh Majīthīā, joined the cabinet as a minister. The compact group of the Akālīs, under the leadership of Sardār Sampūran Singh, aligned itself with the Congress which constituted the Opposition.

Instead of the Communal Award, the Unionist government which was subtly implanting Muslim influence in the Punjab administration, became now the target of Sikh criticism. Since the time of the Akālī agitation for the reform of the *gurdwārās*, the Sikhs had never been so deeply stirred. They unleashed a relentless campaign against the Unionist government and its communal policies. The Sikh platform gained strength and integrity in the process and political schemes for the realignment of Punjab boundaries with a view to securing a more balanced proportion of communal populations began to be propounded. The elder Sikh statesman, Sir Jogendra Singh, carried on a lonely battle in favour of the Federation. He repeatedly contributed articles to *The Statesman*, *The Tribune*, and other Indian newspaper recommending to his countrymen that the Federal part of the Government of India Act be tried. If his advice had been heeded, India probably would not have been confronted with the problems she subsequently had to face.

The autonomy which the provinces enjoyed under the 1935 India Act, with the Federal part of the Constitution shelved, was an encouragement to Muslim chauvinism. In the provinces where they had a majority, the Muslims established their communal sway, gradually disengaging themselves from the concept of a united India. This rising tide of Muslim political fanaticism was a matter of grave concern for the Sikhs. Their population was almost wholly restricted to the Punjab and their history as well as their future was inalienably linked with it. For sheer survival they had to struggle hard. But the pace of events had been too swift for them and the juggernaut of Muslim communalism too powerful. British Parliament's enactments of 1935 had installed the Muslims securely in authority in the Punjab.

The Unionist government in the Punjab, in spite of the support it enjoyed of a section of the Sikhs led by Sir Sundar Singh Majīthīā, was scarcely favourable to their interest. The Premier, Sir Sikandar Hayāt Khān, was an astute statesman and he used the bureaucratic machinery with extra finesse to weaken them socially and politically. He had, additionally, a personal score to settle with the Sikhs. His brother, Sir Liāqat Hayāt Khān, had been deprived of his office of prime minister in the Sikh state of Patiālā by Mahārājā Yādavindra Singh

(1913-74). Sir Sikandar held the entire Sikh community blameworthy for this. World War II gave him an excuse to strike with greater freedom. Some important Sikhs were sought to be implicated on trumped-up charges of sedition. Plans of minor repairs to the Sikh shrine at Anandpur Sāhib were made out in government intelligence reports as attempts by the Sikhs at setting up an arsenal. Fake letters were despatched—and intercepted, implying that the Mahārājā of Patiālā was smuggling arms into his state from tribal areas. Likewise, a report prepared by a committee, headed by an English General, appointed by the British to look into the causes of the slow rate of Sikh recruitment to the army and sent to the Punjab government was suppressed by Sir Sikandar. The report had suggested that the good offices of the Mahārājā of Patiālā be utilized to step up the enlistment of Sikhs. The proposal remained buried in the files of the Punjab government. As the news leaked out, the Sikhs themselves took the initiative. A representative group waited upon Mahārājā Yādavindra Singh and requested him to lead a campaign among the Sikhs for recruitment so that their position in the Indian army remained intact and the British officers who, in view of a few instances of insubordination, had recommended a total embargo being put on their entry into the army could be checkmated. As a result of these parleys, the Khālsā Defence of India League came into being. The Mahārājā became its President-General. He donated to it a sum of Rs 51,000, with an additional monthly subvention of Rs 3,000. Sikh enlistment to the army was accelerated by the efforts of the Mahārājā of Patiālā and the Khālsā Defence of India League.

CHAPTER XXII

ADDING NEW LINES TO ARDĀS

The Muslims took dual advantage of the situation. They built a strong political base in provinces in which they were able to form their own governments. Where the administration was in the hands of the Congress, they raised the cry of Islam being in jeopardy at the hands of the Hindu majority. A tirade of hate and slander was started. Stories of Congress "high-handedness" against the Muslim minority were set afloat and a committee was appointed by the Muslim League in 1938, with the Rājā of Pīrpur as president, to collect information in support of the charge. When, as a protest against the British government's failure to give assurances with regard to India's future after World War II, the Congress ministries in the provinces resigned in November 1939, the Muslim League celebrated what was called a "day of deliverance and thanksgiving." This tactical propaganda produced the desired effect. The Muslim League, which had come off rather poorly in the 1937 elections, was able to rehabilitate itself and rally the Muslims round its banner. The Muslim mind was poisoned against the Congress and an irreparable rift carved between the two communities.

World War II, which involved the British in a grim struggle for survival, gave the Indian Muslims chances of manoeuvre for political advantage. In 1940, at the annual conference of the Muslim League at Lahore, they declared themselves to be a separate nation and demanded portions of India where they were numerically in a majority to be sliced off and constituted into a sovereign Muslim State. The idea was first propounded by the philosopher-poet of Islam, Allama Muhammad Iqbal, in his presidential address at the annual session of the Muslim League held at Allahabad in 1930. The philosophical speculations of the

poet were given the shape of a concrete political formula by a Muslim student at Cambridge, Chaudhri Rahmat Ali. In a pamphlet entitled *Now or Never*, published in 1933, he advocated the division of India into two spheres—Muslim and Hindu. He wrote:

> We do not interdine, we do not intermarry. Our national customs and calendars, even our diet and dress, are different. Hence the Muslims demand the recognition of a separate national status.

In the hands of a politician of Mohammad Ali Jinnah's cold, unyielding logic, will and subtlety, this doctrine of separatism was charged with an ominously practical meaning. Pakistan —the word was coined by Chaudhri Rahmat Ali—became the accepted creed of the Muslims of India. Mr Jinnah, President of the All-India Muslim League, once said:

> Let the British, before they quit, make an award giving the Muslims their bit of the country, however small it might be, and they would live there, if necessary, on one meal a day.

These words truly reflected the temper of Muslim India. The Pakistan Resolution of the Muslim League, the culmination of the process which had started with the Anglo-Muslim parleys at Simla in 1906, had dealt a final blow to Indian unity. The solicitous prophecies of the community's British friends such as John Bright, William Hunter and Wilfred Scawen Blunt were fulfilled. John Bright had, nearly a century before, pointed out the impossibility of one central government for the country. In 1883, Blunt had remarked in Calcutta that "the subcontinent should have two separate governments, a Muslim one in the north, a Hindu one in the south." British sympathy for the Muslim cause had found equally strong support in William Hunter's book on Indian Muslims, published in 1871.

To the Sikhs, the Muslim League resolution came as a violent shock. Dismemberment of India, and their homeland, the Punjab, forming part of a sovereign theocratic Muslim State were proposals utterly unacceptable to them. They unanimously disapproved of the Muslim scheme of Pakistan. But the vehemence with which it was propagated by the League and the visible willingness of the British to yield ground to it made the

Sikhs increasingly apprehensive of their own future. Lord Linlithgow, the Governor-General, gave the Muslims the following assurance in his well-known pronouncement of August 1940:

> It goes without saying that they [the British Government] could not contemplate transfer of their present responsibilities for the peace and welfare of India to any system of government whose authority is directly denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life. Nor could they be parties to the coercion of such elements into submission to such governments.

The possibility of a Muslim State coming into being was more specifically recognized in the British War Cabinet's formula presented to India by Sir Stafford Cripps in 1942. The Cripps proposal offered to give Indian provinces the right to choose whether they would join any union that might be formed at the end of the War or would stay out and form their own State, separately or in collaboration with other provinces similarly inclined. Pakistan was thus clearly promised.

The Sikhs turned down the scheme enunciated by Sir Stafford Cripps. In a representation to him, the Sikh All-Parties Committee declared that the proposals were unacceptable to them for, "instead of maintaining and strengthening the integrity of India, specific provision has been made for separation of provinces and the constitution of Pakistan and the cause of the Sikh community has been lamentably betrayed." The representation further said:

> Why should a province that fails to secure three-fifths majority of its legislature, in which a religious community enjoys statutory majority, be allowed to hold a plebiscite and given the benefit of a bare majority. In fairness, this right should have been conceded to communities who are in permanent minority in the legislature. Further, why could not the population of any area opposed to separation be given the right to record its verdict to form an autonomous unit? We are sure you know that the Punjab proper extended up to the banks of the Jhelum, excluding Jhelum and Multān districts, and the trans-Jhelum area was added by the conquests of Mahārājā Ranjīt Singh and retained by the British for administrative convenience. It would be altogether unjust to allow extraneous trans-Jhelum population which only accidentally

> came into the province to dominate the future of the Punjab proper.
>
> We give below the figures which abundantly prove our contention:
>
> From the boundary of Delhi to the banks of the Rāvī river the population is divided as follows: Muslims, 4,505,000; Sikhs and other non-Muslims, 7,064,600. To this may be added the population of the Sikh states of Patiālā, Nābhā, Jīnd, Kapūrthalā and Farīdkot, which is about 2,600,000. Of this the Muslims constitute barely 20 per cent and this reduces the ratio of Muslim population still further.
>
> We do not wish to labour the point any further. We have lost all hope of receiving any consideration. We shall resist, however, by all possible means, separation of the Punjab from the all-India union. We shall never permit our motherland to be at the mercy of those who disown it.

There was logic in the Sikhs' argument as well as deep anguish of the heart. Out of this argument were evolved certain schemes calculated to subtract non-Muslim areas of the Punjab from the orbit of the proposed Muslim State and to strengthen the Sikh position. Until the announcement of the Communal Award, the thrust of communal politics had been on claiming for each section a larger share of seats in the legislatures. This was now replaced by demands for territorial adjustments to secure greater effectiveness for a religious community. Council representation as a means of communal defence had ceased to be relevant. Enhancement of community's political influence was henceforth sought through readjustment of territorial boundaries. The Sikhs too began to echo this concern for territory as protection. At the Round Table Conference in 1931, they had raised the possibility of boundary redistribution being used as a means of resolving Punjab's communal problem. In a memorandum to the Round Table Conference, the Sikh delegate, Sardār Ujjal Singh, stated that the continued Muslim intransigence would force the Sikhs to press for "a territorial arrangement" of the province to consolidate the Sikh poulation and to create a province in which no single community would constitute a majority.

More concrete formulations issued from the agile and fertile mind of Giānī Kartār Singh, known to be the brainiest of Sikh politicians of that time. He propagated these successive plans with his usual single-mindedness and minute attention to

detail. In the return to the Shiromanī Akālī Dal of the veteran Sikh leader, Giānī Sher Singh, highly skilled in religious and political debate and with an amazing hold over mass sentiment, he gained an influential ally. Giānī Kartār Singh was also assisted in his campaigns by some of his younger colleagues such as Sardār Sādhū Singh Hamdard, Sardār Amar Singh Dosānjh and Sardār Ajit Singh Ambālavī. Several formulae, such as Taqsīm-i-Punjab (Division of the Punjab), Greater East Punjab and Āzād Punjab, were pressed forward one after the other. The Āzād Punjab, which was pursued with some vigour, aimed at integrating the territories of the Punjab where Hindus and Sikhs predominated into a unit separate from Muslim Punjab. The new province of Āzād Punjab would have included the maximum Sikh population, with no single community being in an absolute majority. The Hindus and the Muslims would have been 40 per cent each in the population, and the Sikhs 20 per cent, holding the balance between the two. By the merger in the Punjab of the Sikh princely states, Sikh percentage would have gone up to 24.

Supporting the proposal, Master Tārā Singh, President of the Shiromanī Akālī Dal, said in a statement in June 1943:

> . . .the Shiromanī Akālī Dal hereby declares that in the Āzād Punjab the boundaries shall be fixed after taking into consideration the population, property, land revenue and historical traditions of each of the communities. . . if the new demarcations are effected on the above-mentioned principles, then the Āzād Punjab shall comprise Ambālā, Jullundur, Lahore divisions, and out of the Multān division Lyallpur district, some portion of Montgomery and Multān districts. The Shiromanī Akālī Dal shall make its demand of these demarcations and shall fight for the same.

But as Pakistan began to loom on the political horizon as a reality, the Sikh demand became more radicalized. It now took the shape of a sovereign Sikh State. Once again Giānī Kartār Singh was the originator. In a speech at an all-party Sikh conference in Amritsar in August 1944, Master Tārā Singh declared that the Sikhs were a nation and that, if the country was going to be split, they should not be left at the mercy of either Pakistan or Hindustan. Giānī Kartār Singh

demanded an independent State for the Sikhs. The demand was formally put forward by the Shiromanī Akālī Dal in a resolution passed on March 22, 1946:

> Whereas the Sikhs being attached to the Punjab by intimate bonds of holy shrines, property, language, traditions and history claim it as their homeland and holy land which the British took as a 'trust' from the last Sikh ruler during his minority and whereas the community of the Sikhs is being threatened on account of the persistent demand of Pakistan by the Muslims on the one hand and of danger of absorption by the Hindus on the other, the executive committee of the Shiromanī Akālī Dal demands for the preservation and protection of the religious, cultural and economic and political rights of the Sikh nation, the creation of a Sikh State which would include a substantial majority of the Sikh population and their sacred shrines and historical Gurdwārās with provision for the transfer and exchange of population and property.

But the Sikhs were outpaced by history. All such proposals which were conceived as antidotes to the Muslim demand for sovereignty failed to halt the inexorable march of events, leading to the establishment of Pakistan, without any special safeguards or status for them.

Mr Jinnah, who outwardly maintained an attitude of sullen and studious disregard towards the Sikhs, tried to cajole them privately. He knew in his heart of hearts that Sikh opposition to Pakistan was one real obstacle in his way and made several secret overtures to the leaders of the community. He chided them for being too subservient to Congress influence and held out all kinds of allurements, including the formation of an autonomous Sikh area within Pakistan. Some British officers also conveyed similar offers to Sikh leaders "to enable them to have political feet of their own on which they may walk into the current of world history." Plans were made to have Master Tārā Singh and Jinnah talk together. A meeting took place in Delhi on April 2, 1946, at the house of Sir Tejā Singh Malik, a retired chief engineer who had also been a minister in the princely states of Jaipur and Patiālā. Besides Master Tārā Singh and Jinnah, Mahārājā Yādavindra Singh of Patiālā, his prime minster, Sardār Hardit Singh Malik who was the host's brother, and Giānī Kartār Singh joined the meeting.

Sardār Hardit Singh was assigned to presenting the Sikh viewpoint as the principal spokesman. Jinnah's one overriding concern was to have the Sikhs rescind their opposition to Pakistan and lend his demand their support instead. He was prodigal of assurances, and told the Sikh leaders that the Sikhs would have a position of honour in the new State. But he refrained from elaborating. Sardār Hardit Singh tried to extract from him a more specific enunciation and raised some concrete issues. He said that in Pakistan there would presumably be a parliament, a cabinet, armed services, and so on. He wished Jinnah to say what exactly would be the Sikhs' position in these and other instruments of State. Jinnah dodged by inviting the Sikhs to set forth their demands in writing and by citing the instance of Zaghlul Pasha of Egypt. Zaghlul Pasha, he said, asked the Copts, the Christian minority, to give him their charter of demands. Without having a look at what was written in the document, Zaghlul Pasha signed, "I agree." "That is how I shall treat the Sikhs," said Jinnah. Sardār Hardit Singh continued his thrusts and said, "You are being very generous, Mr Jinnah, but how about your successors? What is the guarantee that they would implement the assurance given by you?" "My friend, in Pakistan my word will be like the word of God. No one dare go back on it," replied Jinnah. The Sikh representatives thought that the Muslim League leader had gone crazy to speak so presumptuously. Jinnah finally asked them to state their demands in writing. Master Tārā Singh, on the other hand, insisted that the offer should come from him.

In a signed article contributed to *The Tribune* for July 19, 1959, Mahārājā Yādavindra Singh of Patiālā recalled another meeting with Jinnah at a dinner hosted by the Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, for him and the League leader. To quote the Mahārājā: "Liāqat Alī and Begam Liāqat Alī [who were also present at the dinner] were most charming to me and went out of their way to offer, on behalf of the Muslim League, everything conceivable. I was to be the Head of this new Sikh State... the Sikhs would have their own army, and so on." But the Mahārājā was not sure how seriously these proposals were made. In any case, the tempers at that time were running so high that the Sikhs did not seem to be willing to revoke their opposition to the Muslim League scheme of Pakistan. Though alarmed at the turn events

were taking in the country, they never lost their balance, nor missed the direction of their history. Two further meetings—one at Jinnah's Aurangzib Road residence where Mahārājā Yādavindra Singh was a guest at tea and the other at Imperial Hotel where Jinnah was the Mahārājā's guest—remained infructuous. The Mahārājā had to invite Jinnah under pressure of the Sikhs who insisted that the Muslim League leader must return his (Mahārājā's) visit.

Further shocks came. Evidence piled up to confirm the Sikhs' suspicion that Muslim exclusivism would be pampered endangering their own position in the Punjab. The offer made by C. Rājagopālāchāri in 1944 to the Muslim League caused deep perplexity among them. The scheme he had framed frankly conceded Pakistan. It completely bypassed the Sikhs and ignored their interests, drawing in fact a line across the Punjab which split the community into two almost equal halves, one to remain in India and the other to become part of the Muslim State of Pakistan. The Sikhs considered these proposals an affront to themselves and called a special convention representing all sections of opinion to record their protest.

In the Simla Conference convened at the end of the European War by the Governor-General, Lord Wavell, to ease the political situation in the country, the Sikhs were given representation along with other communities. Pleading on their behalf, Master Tārā Singh who was among the twenty-one Indian leaders invited, argued that the creation of Pakistan would be more injurious to his community than to anyone else. He could, he added, accept Pakistan only "if Mr Jinnah on his part would agree to a separate State for the Sikhs." The Conference mainly deliberated upon the British proposals for constituting an interim government representing Indian political parties. Though Muslims were fewer than 25 per cent of the Indian population, they were offered an equal proportion of seats with the Hindus. The Governor-General invited the leaders assembled in Simla to make nominations on behalf of their parties for the new government which was to replace his Executive Council. Congress and the Sikhs complied, but Jinnah refused. He insisted on all Muslim members of the government being the nominees of the League and objected to any Muslim name coming from the Congress. Congress could not submit to this

condition. It was an intercommunal party with a sizable Muslim membership. Its president at that time was Maulānā Abul Kalām Āzād, renowned Muslim theologian and statesman, who was one of the leaders participating in the Conference. But Jinnah would not let this impinge on his exclusive right of making nominations for Muslim seats. The Conference was deadlocked on this point, and, on July 14, 1945, Lord Wavell reluctantly announced the failure of his efforts. By wrecking the Simla Conference, Mr Jinnah demonstrated that he alone had the authority to speak on behalf of the Muslim community. This shattered the morale of the Muslims who belonged to other political parties and had kept out of the communal politics of the Muslim League.

The Labour government which took office in Britain in consequence of a national election in the summer of 1945, displacing the Conservative leader, Winston Churchill, promised an "early realization of full self-government in India." It sent out a special mission consisting of three cabinet ministers, Lord Pethick-Lawrence, Sir Stafford Cripps and Mr A.V. Alexander, to negotiate with Indian leaders and settle the basis for an interim government and of a constitution-making body for the country. Talks with various Indian parties dragged on for three months, but no arrangement acceptable to all of them could be evolved owing, primarily, to the pertinacity of the Muslim League. The Cabinet Mission thereupon worked out a plan of its own which was announced on May 16, 1946. Retaining the semblance of a central structure, the substance of the Muslim claim for autonomy was conceded. Three separate zones were proposed, two of which were to consist of Muslim majority provinces. Each provincial group was to have its own constituent assembly to draw up its constitution. A transitional government wholly Indian in composition, except for the Governor-General, was to be set up immediately at Delhi.

The Cabinet Mission proposals contained hardly anything for the Sikhs beyond a rather solicitous reference to them. They were recognized as an important minority like the Muslims and as one of the three main Indian parties, yet they were not accorded the communal veto such as the Muslims had in determining the future constitution, nor were they guaranteed any protection against the Muslim majority rule. In the Constituent

Assembly of Group B to which Punjab had been assigned, they were to have four seats, Hindus 9 and Muslims 23. The Muslims, outnumbering Sikhs and Hindus together, could have established in the region unfettered communal authority. The Sikhs could not regard such an outlook with equanimity. The scheme was subjected to bitter censure at a widely representative Sikh assembly at Amritsar on June 9 and 10. Over a thousand Sikhs drawn from various organizations and sects attended the meeting. Among them were the Congress Sikhs, Akālīs, Nirmalās, Nāmdhārīs, Nihangs and Sikh youth leaders.

The Sikhs' sense of injury and anxiety found expression in many a scathing speech. Most pungent and eloquent were Jathedār Ūdham Singh Nāgoke (1894-1966), a member of the Punjab Legislative Assembly, and Sardār Amar Singh Ambālavī, of the Sikh Students' Federation, chiselled into an ideologically determined and cohesive group by its leader, Sardār Sarūp Singh. Jathedār Nāgoke made the point that their enemy was neither Jinnah nor his client, the Muslim, but the British government who had badly let them down. To make sacrifices for their own preservation, he called for a volunteer corps of two lakhs of Sikhs, the same number as the community had given to the Indian army during World War II. Another member of Punjab Legislative Assembly, Sardār Īshar Singh Majhail, with tears in his eyes, said that the only way to have the wrong done to the Sikhs by the British repaired was to be ready to making sacrifices for the sake of the Panth. Among others who spoke at the Conference were Bhāī Jodh Singh, Principal of Khālsā College, Amritsar, Bāwā Harkishan Singh, Principal of Khālsā College, Gujrānwālā, Bāwā Bachittar Singh, a wealthy businessman of Delhi, Giānī Gurmukh Singh Musāfir, Master Tārā Singh and Mohan Singh, Jathedār of the Akāl Takht, who conducted the proceedings of the meeting. On the second day, the main resolution condemning the British Cabinet Mission's proposals was moved by Sardār Ujjal Singh and seconded by Giānī Kartār Singh. The resolution which was passed unanimously read as under:

> This representative gathering of the Sikhs assembled in Amritsar has given anxious and earnest consideration to the recommendations of the Cabinet Mission read with subsequent elucidation and is of the

opinion that these recommendations will perpetuate the slavery of the country rather than promote the independence of India.

The recommendations are particularly unjust to Sikhs, regard beiag had inter alia to matters specified hereunder:

(a) That the Cabinet Mission while recognizing that the establishment of Pakistan would in particular affect adversely the position of Sikhs have yet by compulsory grouping of provinces made recommendations which in the words of Lord Pethick-Lawrence, Secretary of State for India, "make it possible for Muslims to secure all the advantages of Pakistan without incurring the danger inherent in it."

(b) That the Cabinet Mission while admitting that the cultural, political and social life of Muslims might become submerged in a purely unitary India in which Hindus with their greatly superior numbers must be a dominant element—and this in spite of the fact that Muslims are 9 crores in population and constitute a majority in several provinces of India—have deliberately blinded themselves to the same danger to a greater degree to Sikhs under Muslim domination which is thought to be aggravated by the proposed constitution. Needless to add that even under the proposed constitution, Sikhs have been reduced to a position of complete helplessness which had already exasperated them to the verge of revolt.

(c) That while admitting that the Punjab is the "homeland" of Sikhs, the Cabinet Mission has by its recommendations liquidated the position of Sikhs in their homeland.

(d) That the Advisory Committee set up in Paragraph 20 of the Cabinet Mission's statement is wholly ineffective to safeguard the just rights of Sikhs.

(e) That while the Cabinet Mission made provisions for the protection of the rights and interests of Hindus and Muslims on major communal issues, they have made no such provision for the protection of the rights and interests of Sikhs in the Union or the provincial sphere.

Therefore this Panthic gathering expresses strong condemnation of the recommendations of the Cabinet Mission and declares that they are wholly unacceptable to Sikhs. This gathering further affirms that no constitution will be acceptable to Sikhs which does not meet their just demands and is settled without their consent.

By another resolution, the meeting proclaimed the Sikhs' determination to resist the implementation of the British Cabinet Mission's plan. A council of action, with Colonel Naranjan Singh Gill, of the Indian National Army, as president, was formed and a representative association, called the Pratinidhi Panthic Board, was constituted to guide the affairs of the

community during that crucial period. The Board consisted of Master Tārā Singh, Colonel Naranjan Singh Gill, Bhāī Jodh Singh, Sardār Baldev Singh, Development Minister, Punjab, Jathedār Ūdham Singh Nāgoke, M.L.A., Sardār Sarmukh Singh Chamak, president, Rāmgarhīā Federation, Sant Nidhān Singh Ālam of the Nāmdhārī Darbār, Giānī Kartār Singh, M.L.A., Bāwā Harkishan Singh, Bābū Lābh Singh, president, Shiromanī Akālī Dal, Giānī Gurmukh Singh Musāfir, member of the Working Committee of the Punjab Congress, Sardār Basant Singh of Mogā, Colonel Raghbīr Singh, a former minister of Patiālā state, a representative of the Chief Khālsā Dīwān, a representative of Nirmalā Sikhs and a representative of the Nihangs.

Soon after the Sikhs' conference at Amritsar, Master Tārā Singh wrote a letter to the Secretary of State for India in which he said:

> Since the British Cabinet Mission's recommendations for the future constitution of India have been published, a wave of dejection, resentment and indignation has run throughout the Sikh community. The reasons are quite obvious. The Sikhs have been entirely thrown at the mercy of the Muslims. Group B comprises the Punjab, the North-West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan, and the representation given to each community will be—Muslims twenty-three, Hindus nine and Sikhs four. Can anybody expect from the assembly, constituted as it is, any consideration or justice for the Sikhs? The Cabinet Mission recognizes "the very genuine and acute anxiety among the Sikhs lest they should find themselves subjected to a perpetual Muslim majority rule." If the British Government are not aware of Sikh feeling, the Sikhs will have to resort to some measures in order to convince everybody concerned of the Sikh anxiety in case they are subjected to a perpetual Muslim domination. The Cabinet Mission has not only put under Muslim domination the non-Muslim areas of the Punjab and Bengal but the whole province of Assam where the non-Muslims are in overwhelming majority. This is evidently done to placate the Muslims.

While the Sikhs had unreservedly repudiated long-term as well as short-term proposals made by the Cabinet Mission, the Congress and the Muslim League received them with mixed feelings. For the Congress, the criterion was how far they satisfied the Indian aspiration for deliverance from British rule. The League judged them from the scope they provided the Muslims for secession from India. The principle of grouping

was a clear concession in the direction of Muslim autonomy. But Mr Jinnah resented the retention of any central authority. Assured that the British had decided to free India and take their departure, he resolved to make a final bid for having the country split to secure the Muslims their separate State. To create a new sanction in favour of the Muslim claim, a scheme of violence was prepared. Its dual object was to deepen irreparably the cleavage between the two communities and to intimidate both government and the Congress into submission.

The Council of the Muslim League meeting in Bombay adopted on July 27, 1946, the famous Direct Action resolution. It was a declaration of war against non-Muslim India. The resolution of the League Council ran as follows:

> Whereas the League has today resolved to reject the proposals embodied in the Statement of the Cabinet Delegation and the Viceroy of May 16, 1946, due to the intransigence of Congress on the one hand and the breach of faith with the Muslims by the British Government on the other; and whereas Muslim India has exhausted without success all efforts to find a peaceful solution of the Indian problem by compromise and constitutional means; whereas the Congress is bent upon setting up a Caste Hindu Raj in India with the connivance of the British and whereas recent events have shown that power politics and not justice and fairplay are the deciding factors in Indian affairs; whereas it has become abundantly clear that the Muslims of India would not rest content with anything less than the immediate establishment of an independent and fully sovereign State of Pakistan and would resist any attempt to impose any constitution, long-term or short-term, or setting up of any Interim Government at the Centre without the approval and consent of the Muslim League, the Council of the All-India Muslim League is convinced that the time has now come for the Muslim nation to resort to direct action to vindicate their honour and to get rid of the present slavery under the British and contemplated future of Caste Hindu domination.
> This Council calls upon the Muslim nation to stand to a man behind their sole representative organization, the All-India Muslim League, and be ready for every sacrifice.
> The Council directs the Working Committee to prepare forthwith a programme of direct action to carry out the policy enunciated above and to organize the Muslims for the coming struggle to be launched as and when necessary.

The passing of the resolution was accompanied by scenes of

wild excitement and outbursts of unrestrained incendiarism. Highly provocative speeches were delivered. Jinnah defiantly declared:

> What we have done today is the most historic act in our history. Never have we in the whole history of the League done anything except by constitutional methods and by constitutionalism. But now we are obliged and forced into this position. This day we bid goodbye to constitutional methods . . . . Today, we have also forged a pistol and are in a position to use it.

Explaining the implications of the Direct Action threat, Nawābzādā Liāqat Alī Khān, General Secretary of the Muslim League, said, "Direct Action means resort to non-constitutional methods that can take any form which may suit the conditions under which we live. We cannot eliminate any methods. Direct Action means any action against the law." Sardār Abdur Rab Nishtar spoke in more forthright terms: "Pakistan can only be achieved through shedding blood of others. Muslims are no believers in *ahimsa*."

This decree of violence and jingoism was enthusiastically embraced by the Muslim masses. The Working Committee of the League called upon them to observe August 16, 1946, as the Direct Action Day. Preparations were solemnly set afoot. It was a time of anxious suspense and foreboding for the country. The League was gathering a private army of its own called the Muslim National Guards. Arms were being secretly amassed, petrol stored up and lethal weapons laid in. Muslim League volunteers were especially trained in the skills of stabbing and fire-raising. Simultaneously, a chorus of hate and inflammatory exhortation flowed from the League pulpiteers and newspaper. Communal frenzy was worked up to a dangerous pitch. On the appointed day the storm burst.

In Calcutta, the Muslim League gave a foretaste of the civil war with which it had been threatening the country. Conditions there were particularly favourable, with a League ministry, under Mr H.S. Suhrāwardy, holding charge of the provincial administration. Extremely impetuous and volatile, he made intemperate pronouncements and gave a free rein to trouble-makers. He declared the League Direct Action Day a public holiday in Bengal. To ensure that the Muslim League

did not lack means of arson, he issued to his cabinet colleagues special coupons for 700 gallons of petrol which was in short supply in those days and was strictly rationed. These coupons were passed on to League volunteers who let loose horror on the Hindu population of Calcutta on the morning of August 16. Stabbing, looting and burning were the order of the day. For four days the League desperadoes had the city at their mercy, rioting and killing at will. The police looked on without trying to interfere. It acted only where there was any chance of the Hindus retaliating. According to a rough estimate at the time, nearly 5,000 lives were lost in the Calcutta killing, over 15,000 persons were injured and about one hundred thousand were rendered homeless.

A week before the League's Direct Action Day, Congress had accepted the invitation extended by the Viceroy to form an interim government. The Muslim League, bent on making a show of its strength, had declined the offer. The third important Indian party, the Sikhs, though sorely resentful of the British proposals, joined hands with the Congress in forming a government at the Centre. On Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's appeal, the Panthic Board at their meeting on August 14, 1946, while reiterating that the Cabinet Mission scheme was unjust to the Sikhs, retracted their boycott of it. Sardār Baldev Singh (1902-61) was named the Sikh representative for the Interim government which was sworn in on September 2, 1946.

The Muslim League's attitude towards Pandit Nehru's government was summed up in the words of Suhrāwardy who had said that, if the Congress were put into power, the result would be "the declaration of complete independence by Bengal." "We will see," he added, "that no revenue is received by such central government from Bengal and consider ourselves as a separate State having no connection with the Centre." A little later, however, the Muslim League agreed to enter the Interim government, reserving its decision with regard to the Constituent Assembly. Its sole purpose in joining the Interim government was to wreck it from within so that no central authority could strike root in the country prejudicing the Muslim claim for a separate State.

The Constituent Assembly was scheduled to convene on

December 9, 1946, and yet another attempt was made to bring about a settlement between the major parties and secure the League's co-operation. Representatives of the Congress, the Muslim League and the Sikhs were invited for discussion with Prime Minister Attlee and his colleagues. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardār Baldev Singh, Mr Jinnah and Mr Liāqat Alī flew with the Viceroy to London on December 2. The Sikh representative supported the Congress standpoint on all major issues. The negotiations broke down once again owing to Jinnah's stubbornness. Nehru and Sardār Baldev Singh returned to India on the fifth day, while Jinnah stayed back to convass for his claim for a sovereign Muslim State. The burden of his speeches everywhere was that India's choice lay between Pakistan and civil war. In a broadcast to the United States of America from London, he observed, "The sooner Britain declared its intention of giving effect to Pakistan, the greater the chance of avoiding a terrific disaster."

The threat was being vindicated by a calculated programme of violence. The assumption of office by the Interim government on September 2, was received by the Muslims of Bombay with an attack on the Hindus. Three days later, there was another outbreak of trouble in Calcutta. But what happened in October in the remoter, overwhelmingly Muslim, districts of Noākhalī and Tipperā was unsurpassed for the outrage committed. Hundreds of Hindus were cruelly done to death, their womenfolk abducted and compelled to marry Muslims and their property looted. Large masses of people were forcibly converted to Islam. The Muslim League government of Bengal did not let the news of the carnage go out for many days, but, when it did trickle through, there were reprisals in Bihar where Muslims suffered terror and atrocity. Mahatma Gandhi reproved the Hindus for what they were doing in Bihar and said that he would fast unto death unless they called a halt to that madness. This quickly restored peace in the troubled areas. Mahatma Gandhi visited Noākhalī and, walking barefoot, toured dozens of riot-affected villages to heal the prevailing discords. The Sikhs of Calcutta did a notable humanitarian job at the time of the Great Killing, saving many innocent lives in Hindu as well as in Muslim localities.

The rioting became fiercer as it spread northwards. The

Muslim populations of these regions were easily excitable and, when they chose Sikhs to be their main target, their malevolence was uncontrollable. In the eyes of the Muslim League, the Sikhs were the only viable obstruction to Pakistan. As Justice G.D. Khoslā, Chairman of the Fact Finding Organization, set up by the Government of India, observed:

> The Sikhs had opposed the partition of India with even greater vigour than the Hindus, because they felt that as a community they could only expect disaster in Pakistan; it was, therefore, against the Sikhs that the spearpoint of the Muslim League attack was first aimed. In the March riots, the Sikhs of Rawalpindi faced annihilation and a large number of them left the district. Within a few weeks almost the entire Sikh population had migrated from the district.

The pogrom of the Sikhs was started from the district of Hazārā in the North-West Frontier Province in the first week of December 1946. The Muslim masses had been ceaselessly fed on fanatical invective against Hindus and Sikhs. Highly coloured and exaggerated accounts of the happenings in Bihar were circulated to excite their wrath. Another point of attack was the Congress ministry which had assumed administration of the North-West Frontier Province after defeating the Muslim League in the provincial legislature. The district of Hazārā, dominated by Punjabi-speaking Muslims, was particularly susceptible to the Muslim League propaganda. A "holy war" was declared on Hindus and Sikhs who were in a microscopic minority in the district. Local Muslims were joined by tribal marauders in an orgy of slaughter and plunder. Sikh habitations were wiped out, *gurdwārās* were desecrated and evacuees from places of danger ambushed and massacred. Large numbers of despoiled, helpless refugees immigrated into the Punjab, seeking asylum, especially, in the Sikh states of Patiālā and Farīdkot. Most sorrowful among them were those who had been forcibly shorn of their sacred locks. To quote from a Memoir of Mahārājā Yādavindra Singh of Patiālā, published in the *Sikh Sansar* of California, December 1974:

> There was such a clamour among Hindus and Sikhs of the north-west to reach Patiala—to escape despoilation and torture. They

> came in swarms. They came jampacked in trains, huddled on trainroof, standing on footboards, clutching on to handlebars. They had lost everything they possessed. Some arrived forciby shaven; some without their wives, their daughters—a human tragedy on a vast scale. The word "refugee" suddenly acquired such reality—such poignancy. They had lost everything; yet they felt relieved to reach—at least safety. Each day we received 10-15-20 thousand people. How they were fed, I don't know. We did our best as a government—as individuals. For me, it was my personal concern, my personal responsibility. We did all we could to feed those vast columns of uprooted humanity, to give people work to do, to rehabilitate them. . . .

By its policy of lawlessness and bloodshed, the Muslim League had forced the issue of Pakistan and extracted acquiescence from the British as well as from the people of India, except, of course, the Sikhs. In the Interim cabinet, its nominees acted with the motive of obstructing its functioning as a composite responsible government and of subverting the whole process. For the Congress leaders this was an utterly frustrating experience. In face of the Muslim temper, the division of India seemed inevitable.

On February 20, 1947, Prime Minister Attlee announced in the House of Commons his government's definite intention of transferring power to India without waiting for a settlement of the communal problem. Administration was to be handed over on a date not later than June 1948, to "some form of Central Government for British India or in some areas to the existing Provincial Governments. . . ." Pakistan now seemed nearer than ever before, and the League directed its energies towards capturing power in provinces in which Muslims were in a majority so that it could inherit authority in those areas upon the withdrawal of the British.

Against Sir Khizar Hayāt Khān's cabinet in the province of the Punjab, which represented a coalition of the Unionist Party, Congress and the Sikhs under a Muslim premier, the League had already launched a direct action campaign. In view of Mr Attlee's statement, it became even more important for it to oust Sir Khizar and take the reins of government into its own hands. He at last gave way before the mounting anger of the Muslim masses and the vile obloquy and billingsgate

hurled at him. He laid down office on March 2, 1947, making room for the Muslim League to set up its own government. Sir Evan Jenkins, the Governor, invited the Khān of Mamdot, the leader of the Muslim League party in the provincial assembly, to form a ministry. The Muslim League had a strength of 79 in a house of 175, and needed the support of a few more members to secure a majority.

The Muslim League made desperate efforts to win over the Sikh group in the legislature. Messages were sent to Panthic leaders who were holding a meeting at the residence of Sardār Swaran Singh, a former colleague of Sir Khizar's in the Coalition ministry. Tempting offers were made. Since the introduction of provincial autonomy in 1937, Sikhs had never had more than one seat in the Punjab cabinet. Now the Muslim League promised them three in a cabinet of eight, with four Muslims and one agriculturist Hindu. Assurances of a fair share for Sikhs at all levels of the administration were given. Sir Evan, who had at the time of the League agitation deputed a British official to meet the Sikh leaders and mooted the possibility of a Sikh State within Pakistan if they would give up their opposition to it, also tried to get the Muslim League the help of the Panthic leaders. But the Sikhs turned down all such overtures. They were not willing to place the Punjab at the mercy of the Muslims and thus make a gift of it to the Muslim State of Pakistan which then appeared a certainty.

The Sikh leaders had viewed the Muslim civil disobedience movement against the Coalition government of Sir Khizar Hayāt Khān with particular concern and correctly judged its real character. To quote from the official report of the Muslim chief secretary of the Punjab Government:

> Among Hindus and Sikhs resentment at the agitation is growing and, particularly in the case of the latter, in an ominous degree. On the 12th of February, in the second statement he had issued against the agitation since it started, Master Tara Singh declared that it was communal in its essentials and had as its purpose the domination of the Punjab by Muslims. He called on the Sikhs to prepare themselves to face the Muslim League onslaught and towards this end to reorganize the Akal Fauj.

Master Tārā Singh now dramatically announced Sikhs' dissociation from ministry-making in the Punjab. Coming out of the assembly chamber at the head of a small group of twenty-two Panthic members of the legislature (March 3, 1947), he started shouting anti-Pakistan slogans. "Down with Pakistan," chimed in other members of the party. A vast concourse of Muslims stood outside anxious for the news of the formation of a League ministry. The crowds went wild with rage to hear the slogans uttered by Sikh legislators. They would have cut the Sikhs to shreds and muffled their voice of protest but for the intervention of Miān Iftikhār-ud-Dīn, a Congressman-turned-Muslim Leaguer, who was able to persuade them to let the Sikhs pass unmolested. The Sikh leader, Master Tārā Singh, had taken a grave risk, but this decisive action of his caught history by the forelock. It unmasked the real intentions of the Muslim League in the Punjab and gave a timely warning to Hindus and Sikhs. A firm step had been taken towards saving at least part of the Punjab from being included in Pakistan.

Chagrined at their failure to seize power in the Punjab, the Muslims wilfully laid a spark to the highly combustible situation which they had wrought by their relentless campaign of hate and bellicosity and their secret warlike preparations. Stabbing assaults on Hindus and Sikhs began in Lahore on March 4, 1947. These were followed by large-scale arson and murder. Non-Muslim business campuses and residential localities were looted and set on fire. The following day the trouble spread to Amritsar. March 5 is the Convocation day at the Sikhs' famed seat of learning—the Khālsā College. Taking his University degree at the ceremony, an unsuspecting Sikh youth, Mohan Singh, with the exultation of the event still in his heart, came out into town. In the centre of the main shopping street, called Hall Bazar, he was pounced upon by a Muslim crowd and gored to death on the spot. This was the signal for a general massacre and incendiarism. Minutes after the murder in Hall Bazar, a group of leading Sikh citizens of Amritsar, including Bhāī Vīr Singh, the famous poet and philosopher, was caught up in the Muslim crowd while returning from a meeting of the Punjab and Sind Bank. One of the mob leaders recognized the Sikh savant and was able to dissuade his comrades from

attacking the dignitaries.

Maddened with the desire to kill, Muslim mobs milled the streets of the city of Golden Temple killing whoever they could lay their hands on and setting ablaze whole blocks of houses and shops belonging to Hindus and Sikhs. They went out in a huge mass the following evening to attack the Golden Temple, but were beaten back in a pitched street-fight by a handful of Sikhs under the leadership of Jathedār Ūdham Singh Nāgoke. The same day a train coming into the city was held up by the Muslims of Sharīfpurā, a suburb of Amritsar, and its Hindu and Sikh passengers picked out for slaughter. In Amritsar, Hindus and Sikhs were evenly matched with the Muslims in numbers and they could have given back to the latter as good as they got, but the police, predominantly Muslim, while taking no chances where there was any possibility of retaliation, gave the aggressors a completely free hand.

Odds against the Sikhs were heavier in Multān and Rāwalpindī which, simultaneously with Amritsar, witnessed the outbreak of disorder on March 5, 1947. In Multān, it started with an attack on a peaceful procession of Hindu and Sikh students protesting against the firing on students in Lahore. Soon the whole city was in the hands of assassins. For three days stabbing and looting continued unchecked. Of the first eight persons killed, seven were Sikhs. Dr Saif-ud-Dīn Kitchlew, a leading Muslim Congressman, who happened to be on a visit to the city, barely escaped with his life. His host, Seth Kalyān Dās, was murdered, and his palatial house was sprayed with petrol and set alight.

The sledge hammer of Muslim violence fell most disastrously on the Sikhs in Rāwalpindī division. In the rural areas, where they were severely outnumbered, they faced total annihilation. Frenzied Muslim mobs would assemble from all over, beating drums and shouting their religious war cries. They would trap the scanty Sikh populations in their villages and start making short work of them. Sikhs were hunted down in their homes, in *gurdwārās* and in the shelters offered them by friendly local Muslims. Indiscriminate murder was the fate of those who fell into the hands of the raiders. Neither woman nor child was spared. The holocausts Sikhs had suffered in the eighteenth century were thrown into the shade by this

organized butchery. What the Sikhs were suddenly confronted with is described by General Sir Frank Messervey, GOC-in-C, Northern Command, who became the first Commander-in-Chief of the Pakistan Army. He wrote:

> The main attack, if you can call it that, took place on a night—I think March 7th. . . when unfortunately I had a sort of "coming out" party for my daughter in Command House. There had been little warning, though some small preliminary rioting had led us to have the British battalion in 'Pindi at short notice. It was a concerted attack, and very widespread throughout the rural areas, which suggested that it had been planned, and made it very difficult to deal with—entirely different from the normal communal riots in large cities. I flew in a small plane low over villages in the 'Pindi district, where there was a mixture of Muslim and Sikh population. It was a horrible sight. You could see corpses laid in the fields just outside a village, like rabbits after a shoot. As many reliable people said, the attacks seemed to be almost entirely anti-Sikh. I remember one of my staff, a G. 2, who went down to 'Pindi station to get a ticket on a warrant, coming back very white-faced, to say that while he was at the ticket office he had felt a weight against his back, and turned to find it was a Sikh stabbed in his back and dead, but not a soul would say they had seen anybody do it. Also, I remember an officer's wife arriving by train. The train had been stopped outside Chaklala and she heard shrieks and groans (the time was just about dawn). She lowered a shutter, and looked out, to find Sikhs being dragged out of the carriages and hacked to pieces by the side of the line. She was horrified and screamed, whereupon one of the band came up to her carriage and said, "Don't be frightened, Memsahib, nobody will harm you. We've just got this job to do, and then the train will go on."

In face of this ruthless onslaught, the Sikhs did not fail to reproduce their inheritance of courageous and heroic action. They fought back the invading crowds bravely, at places single-handed, holding them at bay. Many won laurels of martyrdom while trying to protect their *gurdwārās* from desecration. The women jumped into wells to save themselves the dishonour of being captured by the marauders. In the village of Thohā Khālsā alone, ninety-three Sikh women immolated themselves in this manner. To their *ardās*, which recounts deeds of Sikh heroism and martyrdom, the Sikhs now added new stirring lines as indeed they had done at all difficult periods of their history.

CHAPTER XXIII

MIGRATION AND RESETTLEMENT

With the change of Viceroyalty in March 1947, there arrived upon the scene Lord Mountbatten, resolved to give a further momentum to the march of history. He accelerated the date of British withdrawal from June 1948 to August 14, 1947, and set feverishly to working out the details of the procedure. Caught in this whirlwind of events, the Sikhs were again outstripped and they lost that decisive influence in the affairs of the Punjab to which they thought they were entitled by virtue of their spiritual and economic involvement in the region.

Though Lord Mountbatten's brief was to work for a unitary government for India on the basis of the Cabinet Mission Plan, he soon realized that the communal chasm in India had widened beyond repair. The eastern and north-western parts of the country were engulfed in a civil war. The functioning of the central government in Delhi had been atrophied by the intractability of the Muslim League ministers who had joined the Interim cabinet with a view to sabotaging it. Slicing the country into two sovereign States seemed the only way out of the impasse.

A Sikh lawyer, Sardār Narotam Singh, made a lone and, apparently, belated and profitless attempt to halt the chaotic procession of events and prevent the division of the country. He made a petition to the Governor-General in Council that, since the Muslim League was an association which encouraged and aided persons to commit acts of violence and intimidation and interfered with the administration of the land, it should be declared an unlawful association under Section 16(2) of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1908.

The Sikhs' concern now was to save for India and for themselves as much of the Punjab as they could from going into the Muslim State of Pakistan which was in process of formation. The old Sikh leader, Bābā Kharak Singh, in a Press statement on April 14, said, "I am a staunch advocate of Akhand (undivided) Hindustan. . . . Should, however, partition become inevitable and be unfortunately thrust upon us, I would plead for adequate safeguards and legitimate protection for the non-Muslim minorities living in the territories proposed to be partitioned."

The Shiromanī Akālī Dal at a meeting at Amritsar made a concrete proposal and said, in a resolution, that partition of the Punjab was the only remedy to end communal strife in the area and suggested the appointment of a Boundary Commission for purposes of determining the boundaries. On April 18, Master Tārā Singh, Giānī Kartār Singh and Sardār Baldev Singh, Defence member in the Interim government, met Lord Mountbatten and put forward a plea for the division of the Punjab. To ensure, as far as possible, the solidarity of the Sikhs and to protect their special interests in the farmlands in the irrigation colonies and their religious shrines such as Nankānā Sāhib, they proposed the River Chenāb as the boundary line. The idea received influential support from Congress leaders. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in a public speech on April 20, 1947, declared: "The Muslim League can have Pakistan if they wish to have it, but on the condition that they do not take away other parts of India which do not wish to join Pakistan." When the Constituent Assembly met on April 28, the President, Dr Rajendra Prasad, said:

> While we have accepted the Cabinet Mission's Statement of May 16, 1946, which contemplated a Union of the different provinces and states within the country, it may be that the Union may not comprise all provinces. If that unfortunately comes to pass, we shall have to be content with a constitution for a part of it. In that case, we can and should insist that one principle will apply to all parts of the country and no constitution will be forced upon any unwilling part of it. This may mean not only the division of India, but a division of some provinces. For this we must be prepared and the Assembly may have to draw up a constitution based on such a division.

Sardār Swaran Singh, who was the Sikhs' representative in the Khizar ministry in the Punjab before it fell in the commotion created by the Muslim League, said on May 10, 1947, that the Sikhs were determined not to remain under Muslim domination. He reiterated the Sikh demand for the division of the Punjab along the natural boundary of the Chenāb to secure a fair distribution of the population, property and provincial assets.

The prospect of the Punjab being parcelled out into two parts repelled the Muslims. This, in their eyes, amounted to the mutilation of the Pakistan of their dreams. Jinnah spoke out acidly on April 30 and denounced the proposal for the partition of the provinces as "a sinister move, actuated by spite and bitterness." Efforts were also made to win over the Sikhs and bring them round to giving up their demand for partitioning the Punjab. One of the League leaders, Shaukat Hayāt Khān, said in a statement that, under a Muslim League government, the Sikhs' legitimate rights would be fully considered and "justice meted out to all freely and equally." But the Sikhs knew well enough what these assurances were worth. They were still nursing their injury for the indiscriminate death and indignity heaped on them by the Muslims in their giant murderous assault in the name of Pakistan.

Some British officers also explored the chances of a last-minute *rapprochement* to prevent the vivisection of the Punjab and of the Sikh population. A plan which was pursued with some assiduity emanated from the Muslim state of Bahāwalpur. Mr Penderel Moon, of the Indian Civil Service, who was then Revenue and Public Works minister at Bahāwalpur, had some friends among the Sikhs. Through Sardār Sant Singh, who was prime minister of the Sikh state of Nābhā, he made approaches to the Sikh leaders, including Sardār Baldev Singh, Giānī Kartār Singh and Master Tārā Singh. Taking into confidence Mushtāq Ahmad Gurmānī, who was his prime minister at Bahāwalpur, Mr Moon offered to secure the Sikhs (i) a separate unit of Eastern Punjab with a position in Pakistan equal to that of any other unit such as Sind or Western Punjab; (ii) special privileges for the Sikh minority in Western Punjab; and (iii) special privileges for the Sikhs in Pakistan as a whole.

But the Sikhs were not prepared to consider any proposal for a settlement with the League. As Mr Moon says in his book *Divide and Quit*, the Sikh leader he was scheduled to meet at Lahore failed to turn up at the appointed rendezvous. "It was obvious that he was not interested and had other policies in mind."

At the instance of the Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, two of the Sikh Mahārājās—Yādavindra Singh of Patiālā and Harindar Singh of Farīdkot—held separate talks with Mr Jinnah. The League leader repeated his usual assurances for the protection of the rights of their community, but the Sikh rulers were too well trained in the art of statecraft to put their trust in the vague guarantees offered. The negotiations started by the Viceroy were foredoomed to failure.

Meanwhile, Lord Mountbatten, who had given up all hope of being able to keep India united, evolved a new plan based on the principle of partition. To secure the approval of His Majesty's government, he made a hurried trip to London accompanied by his Reforms Secretary, V.P. Menon, who had supplied the initial draft of the scheme. The British cabinet approved the plan, and the statement to be issued on behalf of His Majesty's government was finalized. June 2 was fixed for the plan to be presented to the Indian leaders.

The Mountbatten Plan envisaged the division of the country into two dominions, India and Pakistan, and the establishment of a second and separate Constituent Assembly, consisting of the representatives of those areas which decided not to participate in the existing Constituent Assembly. Procedure was outlined to ascertain the will of the minorities in both Bengal and the Punjab whether they wished to join the new Constituent Assembly or the old one. The legislative assemblies of these provinces (excluding the European members) were each to meet in two sections, one representing the Muslim majority districts according to the 1941 census figures and the other the rest of the province. The members of the two sections of each legislative assembly sitting separately were to vote whether or not the province should be partitioned. If either part decided, by a simple majority, in favour of partition, the province was to be divided. In the event of a decision involving partition of a province being taken, a boundary commission was to be

set up. Apparently as a sop to the Sikhs, it was laid down that, in demarcating the boundaries, the commission would be "instructed to take into account other factors" besides that of the population.

Lord Mountbatten returned to Delhi on May 31. At the meeting of the Indian leaders on June 2, he said that "he was most distressed about the position of the Sikhs. He did not think that any other single question had been discussed in London at such great length as this. He had repeatedly asked the Sikh leaders whether they desired the partition of the Punjab. The Sikhs were so spread out over the Punjab that any partition would necessarily divide their community. For the purpose of 'notional partition' different formulae had been examined, but no solution had been found to safeguard the interests of the Sikhs. It had not been possible to adopt any principle other than division between Muslim majority and non-Muslim majority areas. The notional partition would be entirely provisional. The Boundary Commission, on which the Sikh interest would of course be represented, would have to work out the best permanent solution."

Sardār Baldev Singh, the Sikh spokesman, conveyed acceptance of the principle of partition as enunciated in the plan, but urged that the problems of the Sikhs and their demands be kept in view while framing terms of reference for the boundary commission. Shri J.B. Kripalani, the Congress President, wrote to the Viceroy the same evening a lengthy letter in which he made a reference to the Sikhs. He said that His Majesty's plan would result in injury to them unless great care was taken and their peculiar position in the Punjab was fully protected.

The next morning (June 3, 1947), when the Viceroy resumed his conference with the leaders to acquaint them with the replies he had received from the three political parties, Sardār Baldev Singh proposed that instructions to the boundary commission should be included in the statement to be issued by government. Lord Mountbatten did not wish to risk a discussion on details and persuaded him not to press the point.

In the evening, he made a broadcast over the All India Radio. He declared that, much as he wished, it had not been possible to obtain agreement on the Cabinet Mission plan or on any other plan that would preserve the unity of India. He

outlined the main features of his scheme. Referring to the Sikhs, he said that they were so distributed that any partition of the Punjab would inevitably divide them. It was, he added, sad to think that partition of the Punjab which the Sikhs themselves desired could not avoid splitting them to a greater or lesser degree. The exact degree of the split would be left to the boundary commission on which they were to be represented.

After the Viceroy had spoken, His Majesty's government's statement was broadcast and released to the Press. Then the three Indian leaders, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Mr M.A. Jinnah and Sardār Baldev Singh, representing the three major political parties, made their broadcasts.

The Mountbatten formula was accepted. The Indian parties agreed to divide the country. Why the Sikhs had proposed partition of the Punjab was still not quite clear to Lord Mountbatten who, at a Press conference on June 4, said, "I found that it was mainly at the request of the Sikh community that the Congress had put forward the resolution on the partition of the Punjab. I was not aware of all the details, and, when I sent for the map and studied the distribution of the Sikh population, I was astounded to find that the plan which they had produced divided this community into two almost equal parts. I have spent a great deal of time seeing whether there was any solution which would keep the Sikh community more together. I am not a miracle worker and I have not found that solution." For the Sikhs, this momentous decision of their history was easily made, once Pakistan had become an inevitability.

The Congress, after having worked for a while with Liāqat Alī Khān and his colleagues in the Interim government, had realized how futile it was chasing the mirage of a united India in face of the fanaticism of the Muslim League. So Pandit Nehru gave his acceptance. Talking thirteen years later to a British journalist, Leonard Mosley, he said, "The truth is that we were tired men, and we were getting on in years too....We saw the fires burning in the Punjab and heard every day of the killings. The plan for partition offered a way out and we took it." Mr Jinnah, a sick man and anxious to secure within his own lifetime whatever he could, swallowed the bitter pill and accepted a "truncated" Pakistan. The Sikhs acquiesced in the arrangement. For the protection of their interests, they now trusted to the boundary

commission which was to be set up to draw the dividing line on the map of the Punjab.

While, perhaps, each of the three parties accepted the June 3 proposals as being, from its own viewpoint, the best obtainable in the prevailing political situation, there was wide acclaim for the earnestness and boldness of policy displayed by British government. Typical of the general reaction were the enthusiastic comments of the famous columnist, Walter Lippmann, who wrote in *The Washington Post*:

> Perhaps Britain's finest hour is not in the past. Certainly this performance is not the work of a decadent people. This on the contrary is the work of political genius requiring the ripest wisdom and the freshest vigour and it is done with an elegance and a style that will compel and will receive an instinctive respect throughout the civilized world. Attlee and Mountbatten have done a service to all mankind by showing what statesmen can do not with force and money but with lucidity, resolution and sincerity.

When the Punjab Legislative Assembly met to vote whether to join the Constituent Assembly at Delhi or a new one, the Muslim majority, as expected, turned the scales in favour of the latter course. Members from the Muslim majority areas of West Punjab, sitting separately, decided by sixty-nine votes to twenty-seven against the partition of the province. But the members from the non-Muslim majority areas of East Punjab decided in their meeting, by fifty votes to twenty-two, to secede and join the existing Constituent Assembly at Delhi.

To split the provinces of Punjab and Bengal, two separate boundary commissions were constituted. Sir Cyril Radcliffe, an expert on arbitration who had been called out from England, was appointed chairman of both. He had not been to India before. His absolute neutrality between the Indian political parties and communities was cited, especially to the Sikhs, as his strongest credential for the momentous task entrusted to him. Sir Cyril arrived in Delhi on July 8 and Independence day, fixed for August 15, was a bare five weeks away. During this short time, he had to complete his extremely complicated and delicate assignment. Besides the chairman, the Punjab Boundary Commission had four other members, all judges of the Punjab High Court. One of them was a Hindu, Justice

Mehr Chand Mahājan, and two were Muslims, Justices Dīn Muhammad and Muhammad Munīr. Justice Tejā Singh was the Sikh member. He had lost a large number of his relations in a Muslim riot in Rāwalpindī, but the people's hearts had turned so bloodless in those days of communal madness that a suggestion to the Muslim League members by the Governor of the Punjab, Sir Evan Jenkins, for a condolence visit to the bereaved Sardār was unceremoniously rejected.

The Sikhs' attention was now directed to securing from the boundary commission a favourable demarcation in the Punjab. They started collecting figures and data in support of their claim. Petitions were drafted and maps drawn. The ablest of Sikh lawyers at the Punjab High Court, Sardār Harnām Singh, took charge of the legal aspect of the case. The leaders tried to build up political pressure. July 8 was observed as a pledge-taking day when the Sikhs renewed their resolve to spare no effort or sacrifice in pursuit of their object. A week later, Giānī Kartār Singh, president of the Shiromanī Akālī Dal, made a Press statement in which he said:

> The Sikhs will not rest content till the boundary line is demarcated in such a way that it leaves at least 85 per cent Sikhs in India.... The Panth, in general, and the Sikh political workers, in particular, may well be proud of the completeness with which the prayer of pledge-taking day of July 8 was observed all over the province. It is clear that stark realities of the distressing situation have gone home to every Sikh, however cut off from the usual sources of political knowledge he may have been.
>
> Some Muslim League leaders have taken offence at this harmless expression of Sikh agony and have issued extravagant statements calculated to embitter feelings between the two communities. They have demanded the Sutlej as the dividing line in the Punjab. Only a few weeks back they proposed to fight for every inch of the Punjab, and now they have retreated to the Sutlej. There are some more weeks to August 15 and their pace of retreat is not slow either.
>
> Everyone knows that the Boundary Commission in the Punjab is charged through June 3 statement of the Viceroy with the task of determining the extent to which the Sikh community is divided. The points for consideration before this Commission are contiguous majority and "other factors". Obviously the factor of contiguous majority is only one of the several factors which will claim the attention of the Boundary Commission. If application of the contiguous majority principle does not yield equitable results,

any other factor will naturally overrule it in order that justice may be done.
In the districts of Sheikhupura, Lyallpur and Gujranwala there are large non-Muslim majority tracts. This area is also hallowed by the situation in it of a number of historic *gurdwaras* like Nankana Sahib and Khara Sauda. How can the Sikhs live away from these springs of their religion? ... A full share in the canal colonies belongs to the Sikhs because it was their sweat and toil which have made these areas so coveted....When Ireland was partitioned were not two counties with Roman Catholic majorities attached with Protestant Ulster for purely economic considerations?
The Sikhs will not rest content till—

(1) The boundary line is demarcated in such a way that it leaves at least 85% Sikhs in India.
(2) Both the States of Pakistan and India are committed to facilitate the transfer of the remaining 15% from Pakistan to India.

Sympathizing with the Sikhs, Arthur Henderson, Under-Secretary of State for India, said in British Parliament that, though the function of the boundary commission was to demarcate boundaries between the two countries on the basis of ascertained contiguous majority areas of Muslims and non-Muslims, it would also take account of other factors. These other factors, he added, would embrace the special circumstances of the Sikh community, the location of its shrines, and so on.

In an interview with Sir Evan Jenkins, the Governor of the Punjab, Giānī Kartār Singh stressed how essential it was to pay regard to Sikh unity in carrying out the plan of partition. It could not be done just on the basis of population. The Sikhs' rich farmlands in the irrigation colonies of Lyallpur, Sheikhūpurā and Montgomery which they had developed with their lifeblood, their *gurdwārās* such as the Holy Nankānā, and other stakes in the region should not be ignored when laying down the boundary line. As Sir Evan subsequently wrote to the Viceroy, Giānī Kartār Singh was cool and matter-of-fact in his argument, but wept when he made his final appeal to him to help the Sikhs in that crucial hour. That a seasoned and hard-headed politician of Giānī Kartār Singh's stature should have broken down is a measure of the tension and anxiety which were the Sikhs' lot at that juncture.

On August 15, India became a free country. Simultaneously, the new State of Pakistan took its birth.

The same day, Sir Cyril Radcliffe left for home. The award he had written was announced two days later. From the Chenāb on which the Sikhs had pinned their hopes, the Indian frontier shrank back to the River Sutlej. Only thirteen districts comprising the Jullundur and Ambālā divisions, Amritsar district of Lahore division and three *tahsīls* (Pathānkot, Gurdāspur and Bātālā) of Gurdāspur district were allocated to Indian Punjab. Lyallpur, Sheikhūpurā and Montgomery were drawn across the border. So were Lahore and the Holy Nankānā. Even an innocent suggestion made to the Viceroy by V.P. Menon for the latter to be treated as "a sort of Vatican" to assuage Sikh feeling did not prove acceptable.

The ominous storm which had been gathering since June 3 broke out with the Radcliffe proclamation. The brief spell of temporary truce, loaded with apprehension, gave way to a period of violent and sanguinary fratricide. To carry its two-nation theory to its logical conclusion, the Muslim League vowed upon the expulsion of Hindus and Sikhs from their newly constituted State. Assaults on them in Sheikhūpurā, Gujrānwālā, Siālkot, and other districts started on August 18—just a day after the Radcliffe award was made known. Sikhs who predominated in the rural areas and were the more resistant were especially singled out by Muslim mobs set on murder and plunder. Mass slaughter, arson and looting spread over vast areas and soon the whole countryside in West Punjab was ablaze.

Although, Mr Jinnah, in his address to the Pakistan Constituent Assembly, assured protection to the minorities, the Muslims were determined to liquidate or banish the Hindus and Sikhs. They made no secret of their intention, either. On September 5, an influential Urdu newspaper of Lahore, the *Zamīndār*, published on its front page a highly inflammatory poem against the Sikhs the burden of which was:

Koī Sikh rahne nā pāi maghrabī Punjab mein
(Let no Sikh be allowed to remain in West Punjab)

A mere coincidence, but on the same day the West Punjab Governor, Sir Francis Mudie, wrote to his Governor-General,

Mr Jinnah, a letter which showed how anxious the Pakistan government was to secure mass migration of the Sikhs and how it abetted all the horrible crimes against them. Sir Francis, in his letter, said:

> The refugee problem is assuming gigantic proportions. The only limit that I can see to it is that set by the census reports. According to reports, the movement across the border runs into a lakh or so a day. At Chuharkana, in the Sheikhupura district, I saw between one lakh and a lakh and half of Sikhs collected in the town and round it, in the houses, on roofs and everywhere. It was exactly like the Magh Mela in Allahabad. It will take 45 trains to move them, even at 4,000 people per train: or, if they are to stay there, they will have to be given 50 tons of *ata* a day.... I am telling everyone that I do not care how the Sikhs are got rid of as soon as possible. There is still little sign of the 3 lakh Sikhs in Lyallpur moving, but in the end they too will have to go.

As the tempo of Muslim violence grew, it became apparent that Hindus and Sikhs would have to quit what had now become Pakistan. The idea was inherent in the two-nation theory of the Muslim League and the grand strategy it had adopted to coerce non-Muslims into acquiescence. Conversion of Pakistan into a homogeneous Muslim State depended on the elimination of Hindus and Sikhs. To achieve this consummation, pressure on the non-Muslim population was stepped up.

The Sikhs had been nursing a deep grudge against the Muslims since the Hazārā riots of the winter of 1946. They had been prevented from any counteraction by the dominantly Muslim bureaucracy and police in the Punjab. In East Punjab which had been released from Muslim hegemony, Hindus and Sikhs broke out of their stance and took heavy reprisals. Muslims suffered the full fury of Hindu-Sikh vengefulness. The atrocities they had committed in the Rāwalpindī division in March and, subsequently, in West Punjab districts, were visited on their co-religionists in East Punjab and much innocent blood was spilt. What the Hindus and Sikhs did in East Punjab was a reaction to events in West Punjab. The Muslims had raised the slogan of partition. They had resorted to violence as the final argument in support of their political ambition and were the

first to start communal killing. Retaliation was a natural consequence of this policy of intimidation and bloodshed.

This communal blood-bath could perhaps have been avoided if Jinnah had not held out assurances of protection to the minorities in Pakistan and if the leaders of political parties had spoken out freely what they had in their minds and insisted on a transfer of populations before installing the new governments in office. One man who perceived the logic of the situation correctly and had the courage of his conviction was the Sikh theologian and educationist, Bhāī Jodh Singh. Writing to *The Civil and Military Gazette* of Lahore immediately after the June 3 announcement, he said: "...rough and ready method of dividing the army on communal basis has been finalized. This means that the Pakistan army will consist mainly of Muslims. . . . Now according to the so-called 'notional division' seventeen lakhs of Sikhs are assigned to Western Punjab. The Sikhs are given to soldiering by nature and tradition. Besides, an army career is one of their economic stays. In Pakistan they will be baulked of this . . . frustration leads to embitterment. Will it be politic for the Government of Pakistan to have seventeen lakhs of embittered and determined people on their eastern border? If not, what is the remedy?

"One may think of eliminating the Sikhs by pogroms such as were enacted in some districts of the Rawalpindi division. Such pogroms were possible when things were in a state of uncertainty and flux. Now the division has actually taken place and even the Governor-General for Pakistan has been appointed. The Muslim League leaders are assuring the world that their treatment of minorities would be ideal. Pogroms at this stage will cast a slur on the political honesty of Muslim League. . . .

"Besides, pogroms would not be an easy affair in the eastern-most districts of Pakistan. These districts are inhabited by the Sikhs who provide the best soldiery for the Indian army. In the Rawalpindi division, the Sikhs were not even 5 per cent of the total population. In spite of that wherever they were concentrated in considerable numbers, they successfully resisted the attacks of large mobs and retaliated. In the eastern districts they are not a small minority and their population is

not widely diffused. They are concentrated in compact areas, where in most cases taken together with other non-Muslims and, sometimes even without them, they form a majority. If some hot-headed Muslims plan pogroms in those districts, losses on both sides will be appalling. In addition to this, retaliation in the Eastern Punjab may cause such bloodshed as will weaken both the communities very materially. The only sane and just course for the Muslims is to arrange for the transfer of populations on a large scale. There is no use for a Government to keep under it a population which it cannot use to the best advantage. The Sikhs bereft of their chief occupation of soldiering will never reconcile themselves to a Government which deprives them of it.

"To provide for an equitable transfer some colony lands must be included in the Eastern Punjab. There are compact areas in these lands wherein the Sikhs form a majority. The Sikhs by their pioneer work in the colonies have made them what they are. It will be advantageous for the Muslim League to agree to a line that will easily induce the Sikhs to migrate to the Eastern Punjab without harbouring any ill will for the Muslim Government.

"The second party to the division are the British Government. They may wash their hands of the affair in the eyes of the world but the division has been the inevitable result of the communal electorates which they introduced. Now that they are quitting India they have, I admit, no use for the Sikhs. But are the politicians to have no moral sense? They should remember that since the annexation of the Punjab the members of this valiant community have been fighting their battles not only on the Indian frontiers but throughout the world. The colony lands were given to the Sikhs mostly for their military services . . . the British have a duty to perform and, as has been admitted by Lord Mountbatten, they must see to it that the splitting up of the Sikhs by the division of the Punjab is reduced to its smallest limits.

" . . . the Sikhs have not willingly asked for the division of the Punjab. The division of India and the treatment meted out to them in the would-be Pakistan State during March last compelled the Sikhs to ask for it. Even now they would fain see the Punjab united if they can live lives of honour and

self-respect in their homeland. They wish all the communities could live peacefully in a united India. Now that the Muhammadans have got what they wanted they should be just and even generous towards another nation. . . . In a family partition the elder brothers are expected to behave generously. . . ."

Subsequent events proved how prophetic the warning contained in this statement was.

Completely overwhelmed by the rising of the Muslim population against them in the wake of Pakistan, the Sikhs sought safety in evacuation. Leaving their homes and lands and their possessions behind, they issued out of their villages in batches to join the ever-expanding columns in their grim and dangerous trek out of Pakistan. Unparalleled in the history of mankind was this migration for its size and for the suffering and deprivation it involved. Besides the tragic uprooting from their homes and hearths and committal to an uncertain future, the emigrants faced the hazards of starvation, epidemics and raids from hostile Muslim crowds. These moving convoys were frequently set upon, their ranks depleted by cold-blooded murder. The womenfolk were abducted and whatever property they were carrying plundered.

What hazards and treacheries these columns of refugees were exposed to will be evident from the fate which overtook 2,000 Sikhs being evacuated from the Muslim state of Bahāwalpur. The Prime Minister of the state, Mr Mushtāq Ahmad Gurmānī, and Revenue Minister, Mr Penderal Moon, were anxious for their safe passage across to India. They gave them an army escort, supplemented by a civilian officer of the rank of assistant commissioner. The column set off from Rahīm Yār Khān on September 26. On the first evening of the march, the escorting body of troop began to search the Sikhs and robbed them of their belongings. One of the *jathā*, Karnail Singh, resisted. He was shot dead along with some others.

To reassure the Sikhs and persuade them to resume the journey, the commanding officer became conciliatory towards them and promised that there would be no recurrence of the incidents that had taken place. But another search was ordered the following evening and the Sikhs were deprived of whatever they had, including the camels and horses carrying their women-

folk and children. Any kind of protest was useless. Assurances of no further harassment were again held out and the Sikhs could do little except continue the rueful journey. At their next halt, two of their leaders, Bakhtāwar Singh and Bhāg Singh, were roused from their slumbers at midnight and asked to get the column ready to start the journey immediately. Suspecting mischief, they protested and were bayoneted to death on the spot.

As the *jathā* started moving, firing was heard from ahead. The Sikhs were told that the firing was coming from a band of Hurs who were waiting to fall upon them. This was only a ruse played upon the hapless refugees. Some of the escorting soldiers had gone forward and hidden themselves behind sand-hills to raise a false alarm. To protect them from the attack of the fanatical "Hurs", the women were forcibly separated from the column. The younger women were distributed among the soldiers and taken back to Rahīm Yār Khān. The rest of the *jathā* fleeing in confusion towards the Indian frontier, a bare three kilometres away, was finished almost to a man between the bullets of their "protectors" from behind and of the "Hurs" in front.

Returning to Rahīm Yār Khān, the escort presented to the state authorities a report, signed by the commanding officer and countersigned by the assistant commissioner, that "the whole column had reached the border in safety and good order and that the refugees had departed with many professions of gratitude for the excellent manner in which they had been looked after and protected from all dangers by the escort of Bahawalpur troops."

Mr Moon whose intuition inclined him to distrust, probed the officers further and secured from the assistant commissioner a confession of the true facts. This gruesome tale of treachery and bloodthirstiness he has related with a painful feeling in his book.

Such despoliation and destruction faced the Sikhs everywhere in Pakistan.

Streams of dazed and dispossessed refugees poured into India from across the border. This mass migration affected more than 30 per cent of the total Sikh population in the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent. Besides the casualties suffered, the loss

in terms of lands, property and business was immense. This was a tremendous blow for the small community. On top of it was the hurt involved in what the Sikhs had suffered at the hands of the Muslims and in their severance from the sacred *gurdwārās*, including Nankānā Sāhib. This traumatic experience could have thrown them into utter despair and disarray. But the qualities of faith, courage and resilience their history had bestowed on them were again their chief assets in this tragic situation. Their spiritual and political morale was intact. From this latest crisis, they derived fresh stimulus just as they had done from the Bloody Carnages in the eighteenth century and were soon launched on the process of recovery. Forgotten was the rancour of the days of intercommunal conflict. The injury caused by partition healed up. Proud of their past, the Sikhs looked to the future with optimism and confidence. Of course, their thoughts turned ever so often to Nankānā Sāhib and other shrines across the border. In the new lines they had added to their *ardās*, they daily prayed:

> O, True Lord!
> Restore unto us
> The privilege of
> Unrestricted pilgrimage
> To Nankānā Sāhib
> And other holy *gurdwārās*
> From which
> The Panth has been parted.

Dearer than homes and lands left behind was the Holy Nankānā.

CHAPTER XXIV

REMOBILIZATION

The toll of partition had nevertheless been the heaviest for the Sikhs. As a community they were the worst injured. The frontier drawn between India and Pakistan split them into two parts, one half suddenly turned into a mass of uprooted, homeless refugees. Nearly two per cent of their total population had been massacred. Their economic losses were incalculable. Yet they survived the tragic convulsion and gradually found their feet in what was left of the Punjab after division. As they overcame the initial shock and passed the first critical milestone, they discovered that they had not been wholly the losers. They had acquired one perceptible advantage—concentration in a single territorial unit.

In pre-partition Punjab, the Sikhs were barely 13 per cent of the population. They were widely dispersed, without a compact base in any sizable area. The migrations into Indian Punjab now bulked them together in a few contiguous districts. For a conscious and vigorous people like the Sikhs with strong religious and cultural aspirations, this consolidation in one geographical tract was an unsuspected boon. By a strange turn of events, they had become integrated numerically as they had never been before. They were now concentrated in an area which could be described as their homeland. As the Sikh leader, Master Tārā Singh, later ruminated in his memoirs, the Sikhs could have staked their claim to an autonomous State had they been as favourably located in any definable territory at the time of the transfer of power.

It was apparent that the Sikhs were destined to play a critical role in residuary Punjab. This had become their asylum in their hour of distress. All of their concerns—cultural, economic

and political—were linked with this tract. The turmoil they had suffered sharpened their sense of survival. Their political superstructure remained more or less intact. The Shiromanī Akālī Dal, with the headquarters in Amritsar, was a platform still alive and flexible. It retained its grassroot affiliations as well as its aura of history. Its legacy of struggle and sacrifice was the Sikhs' most tangible political asset. The Shiromanī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee, again based in Amritsar, kept the religious fabric unimpaired. The leaders, somewhat harassed by the speed of the events, had lost neither their morale nor their ambition. There were several dedicated and striking personalities among them. Giānī Kartār Singh, the most adroit of politicians, was then president of the Shiromanī Akālī Dal. He had earned much popular gratitude and acclaim by his sustained hazardous personal endeavours to have the expatriates come out safely from across the border. The mystique of Master Tārā Singh still prevailed. His name was the mainstay of Sikh political psyche, and he retained his capacity to rally the masses. Their faith in his integrity and in his powers of resolution was undiminished. These two men—Master Tārā Singh and Giānī Kartār Singh—steered the Sikhs into the new epoch, their paths not always converging.

A totally new advantage was the weight of numbers. The Muslims had ceased to be in the East Punjab. Political power was now to be shared by Hindus and Sikhs. All the Hindu and Sikh members of the United Punjab Legislative Assembly were assigned to the East Punjab. The Sikhs numbered thirty-three, ten having been returned in the 1946 elections on Congress nomination and twenty-three on Akālī. The Hindu members belonged to the Indian National Congress. But the party was riven into two factions, one swearing fealty to Dr Gopī Chand and the other to Bhīm Sen Sachar. The Akālī bloc was thus in an advantageous position. The Akālīs had longed for power, and they quickly joined hands with the Congress to form the first government in the East Punjab. Their nominee, Sardār Baldev Singh, was already a member of Jawaharlal Nehru's cabinet in New Delhi, holding the important portfolio of Defence.

This compact with the Congress was the key to power for the Sikhs. At the same time, it seemed a natural culmination of

the process of Congress-Akālī accord dating back to the cataclysmic pre-partition days. Taking a long-range view, the Sikhs had realized that communal voting would have to give way to a joint one in independent India. Giānī Kartār Singh, then president of the Shiromanī Akālī Dal, told a Press conference in Jullundur that the Sikhs would not demand any communal electorate and would cast in their lot with the Congress and give it their full support, if appropriate safeguards were provided for them in the Indian Constitution.

The Shiromanī Akālī Dal permitted the Akālī members of the East Punjab Legislative Assembly to join the Congress. The Working Committee took a formal decision on March 17, 1948. Members vied with one another in supporting the motion. But one who had a sense of foreboding and was disinclined to agree was Master Tārā Singh himself. A lone voice supporting him was that of Jathedār Prītam Singh Gojrān. Master Tārā Singh foresaw in this merger of the Akālī legislators with the Congress the relinquishment by the Shiromanī Akālī Dal of its political status. This he regarded as a denial of its basic character and of the claim of the Khālsā Panth to an entity of its own. Yet for the sake of unanimity, he did not press his point. As he later said, "I merely put up with the decision, but had never really accepted it."

Within a few days of the Working Committee meeting, Master Tārā Singh's dissent had become more pronounced and he started speaking with a sharper thrust and with a surer instinct. A major enunciation of the doctrine of autonomous entity issued from the pulpit of the Sikh Students' Federation. The occasion was its second annual conference convened at Ludhiānā on April 24-25, 1948. Master Tārā Singh had been invited to give the presidential speech. By now he had shed his temporary hesitation and ambivalence. The address he read at the conference was frank and unambiguous—a statement which set the tone and direction of future Sikh politics. The point he stressed with earnest passion and with his natural powers of polemic was the need to preserve the political integrity of the Sikhs. He insisted that the Shiromanī Akālī Dal should retain its authority to take political decisions on behalf of the Sikh community. He joined issue with those who advocated alignment with the Congress as the only course left for the Sikhs—

the only option open if they wished to have a share in political power in independent India. He argued that power derived through the favour of the Congress would be no real power. The real power, according to Master Tārā Singh, could accrue only from the solidarity of the community. He urged for this purpose the retention of the independent character of the Sikh body politic. His appeal was openly in the name of the Panth and he drew upon images and symbols from Sikh tradition and history to buttress his argument. To his fellow countrymen, he presented the plea: "If you are true nationalists, then, for the sake of the nation, you must let the Sikhs live honourably. You will err in attempting to extinguish, in the name of nationalism, the distinctive entity of the Sikhs. We value our honour. If we have no separate existence, we shall have nothing to be proud of." Summing up his address, he declared: "I am firm on one point. The Sikhs must retain their independent political entity." Master Tārā Singh's warning stirred the defensive instincts of the Sikh community; his strategy determined the future pattern of its political mobilization.

Developments took place which redoubled Sikhs' wariness. In the Indian Constitution, no provision was made for the protection of the interests and rights of the Sikhs as a minority. The Constituent Assembly's Advisory Committee on Minorities and Fundamental Rights had in its report of August 8, 1947, recommended reservation of seats in the legislatures for "certain specific minorities," which included Muslims, Scheduled Castes and Christians, but not Sikhs whose case was held over, probably to await announcement of the Radcliffe award on which depended whether they would be a majority or a minority in the new Punjab. There were to be no reservations for minorities in the cabinets, but proportional representation was to be ensured for them by convention. In the services, the "claims of minorities" were to be given due weight and, to ensure protection of the rights of the minorities, an officer was to be appointed by the government. These recommendations were adopted with certain modifications by the Constituent Assembly on August 27, 1947, and then included in Draft Constitution. Again, the Sikh minority was not mentioned as such by the Constituent Assembly.

On February 24, 1948, a special sub-committee with

Vallabhbhai Patel as chairman and with Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr Rajendra Prasad, Dr B.R. Ambedkar and K.M. Munshi as members, was appointed to examine, among minorities' problems affecting East Punjab and West Bengal, the question of safeguards for the Sikhs. The Shiromanī Akālī Dal submitted to the sub-committee a charter of demands seeking for the Sikhs a separate electorate, 50 per cent seats for them in the Punjab legislature and 5 per cent in the Central, reservation of seats in U.P. and Delhi legislatures, the same privileges for the Sikhs as were proposed for Hindu scheduled castes and statutory reservation of a certain percentage in the Indian army. The special sub-committee of the Advisory Committee on Minorities, which met only on November 23, 1948, nine months after it was constituted, sympathized with the Sikhs for "the emotional and physical strain" which had been their lot, but turned down the Akālī memorandum, saying, "We cannot recommend either communal electorate or weightage in the legislatures, which are the main demands of the Shiromanī Akālī Dal." The Advisory Committee upheld the view of the sub-committee and recommended at a meeting held on May 11, 1949, that the "statutory reservation of seats for religious minorities should be abolished." In the Advisory Committee, however, the Sikh members, Giānī Kartār Singh and Sardār Ujjal Singh, were able to extract the solitary concession that Sikhs belonging to four of the scheduled castes—Mazhabī, Rāmdāsī, Kabīrpanthī and Siklīgar—should have the same benefits as their Hindu counterparts. The report of the Advisory Committee came up before the Constituent Assembly on May 25, 1949, and was adopted on the following day.

In the Constituent Assembly, the Sikh representative, Sardār Hukam Singh, made a forceful speech, mixing emotion with innuendo. He charged the Congress and its leaders with breach of faith with the Sikhs, who had been continually assured by it that any final political or constitutional arrangement must have their approval. He sportingly thanked them for the "small mercy" extended to them by partially conceding their demand for sharing privileges allowed to Hindu scheduled castes. Sardar Patel retorted angrily, but the Sikh spokesman had made his point. Both nominees of the Shiromanī Akālī Dal—

Hukam Singh and Bhopinder Singh Mānn—registered their protest by forbearing from signing the Constitution.

In the Punjab or what was spared of it for India, communal feeling was again on the simmer, now between the Hindus and the Sikhs. The former, in a majority after partition, took for granted the latter's renouncement of any individual status for themselves, whereas the latter accumulated complaints of discrimination they suffered as a minority.

Grievances kept mounting. The tone of newspaper writing and of platform speech daily grew more caustic. The main complaints were the Sikhs' scanty share in the administration and the antipathy of the majority community to the marks of their cultural identity. The echoes reached the Assembly chamber and one of the Sikh backbenchers, Jagjīt Singh Mānn, not given to flamboyance or hyperbole, said on the floor of the House on March 18, 1948:

> It is the communal tension we have got as legacy from the British. After the partition of Punjab, this evil has become all the more aggressive. I think it is the main part of the tension. The Hindu officials have been recruited on communal lines, and now they find it hard to shake off the label. There is no change in their mentality. . . .And all the Government officials from the highest to the lowest have communal mentality. So long as this mentality is not changed, the relations between the communities cannot be improved.

Another mild-mannered member, Gurbachan Singh Bājwā, who later became Education Minister in the Congress government, complained:

> Prevalence of communalism in the services is having serious repercussions on the public life in the province. . . .If we want to avoid a repetition of the past tragedy, the confidence of the minority communities will have to be won by the majority community.

Even more scathing was Jathedār Ūdham Singh Nāgoke, who had renounced Akālī politics in favour of Congress policies. In a memorial submitted to the government, he wrote: "There has been a great injustice to the Sikhs in the services. Hindus in the gazetted posts form 71.5 to 96% in P.W.D.,

Electricity, Excise and Taxation and Food and Civil Supplies departments. . . .Hindu officers in the departments are so intoxicated with power which is based on absolute majority that in the day-to-day official dealings they are spreading the venom of communalism, hatred and persecution to the extent of forcing the Sikh employees to leave the departments."

Responding to this rising crescendo of criticism, the Punjab government decided in November 1948 to appoint a minorities committee from among Hindu and Sikh members of the East Punjab Legislative Assembly. The Sikh members of the Assembly, cutting across party affiliations, sat in a bloc and drew up for presentation to the committee a 13-point memorandum. The following were some of the demands listed:

1. Representation be given to the Sikhs on the basis of the 1941 census, without excluding Sikhs who had migrated to other provinces.
2. Sikhs should have one minister and one deputy minister in the Central cabinet.
3. The offices of Governor and Premier of the Punjab should alternate between a Hindu and a Sikh.
4. 50 per cent representation should be the Sikhs' minimum share in the provincial cabinet.
5. Gurgāon district and Lohārū state be separated from the East Punjab.
6. A 40 per cent share be reserved for Sikhs in the services.
7. If the demands were rejected, Sikhs should be allowed to form a new province of seven districts, i.e. Hoshiārpur, Jullundur, Ludhiānā Ferozepore, Amritsar, Gurdāspur and Ambālā.

The minorities committee had neither the will nor real sanction to seize the problem firmly. It transferred the responsibility to a sub-committee consisting of ten members, five Hindu and five Sikh, and asked it to work out a mutually acceptable solution. This again was done half-heartedly. The sub-committee remained moribund and failed to come to grips with the issue. Sikhs stored further resentments. What irked—and saddened—them most was the disavowal of Punjabi language by the majority community. The latter was not willing to let it be admitted into the administrative and educational systems. Even in the Punjabi-speaking areas, Hindus claimed Hindi to be the language of their cultural expression, disdaining Punjabi which they regarded as no more than a dialect for mere spoken

commerce. Sikhs perceived in this rejection of Punjabi bigotry of the majority community who identified Punjabi with their religious custom and culture. Punjabi became, in this way, a crucial symbol of Sikh self-definition. Through it the Sikhs acquired a new sense of nationality and cohesion.

The formal decision making Hindi a medium of instruction in the schools along with Punjabi was announced in June 1948 by the first Premier of the East Punjab, Dr Gopī Chand Bhārgava. This was a concession to those of the majority community who, in spite of being Punjabi-speaking, proclaimed Hindi to be their mother tongue. The Hindi-dominated municipal committee of Jullundur, exclusively Punjabi-speaking, passed a resolution making Hindi the sole medium of instruction for schools within its jurisdiction. The Senate of the Panjab University, meeting on June 9, 1949, turned down by majority vote the proposal for Punjabi being adopted as the medium of instruction, although the Sikh members were agreeable, as a concession to Hindu sentiment, to let it be written in Devanāgarī characters, besides its own script, Gurmukhī. At the time of the 1951 census, an open campaign was carried on to have Hindus living in the East Punjab record Hindi as their mother tongue as against Punjabi. This mass misstatement completely falsified the language returns and these had eventually to be abrogated under instructions of the Government of India. For the Sikhs, this open renouncement of Punjabi by the majority community was totally disenchanting. It sharply impinged on their collective consciousness and alerted them to the need of defending their religious and cultural rights and served to accelerate their political unification as perhaps nothing else could have done.

Sikh feeling was further alienated by the superior tone put on by some of the language newspapers controlled by the majority community. They indulged in gratuitous moralizing and reacted angrily to any mention of Sikh interests or rights. Any demands on behalf of the community were described as unbecoming—parochial and anti-national. The Sikhs took such exhortation as adding insult to injury.

To publicize Sikh platform, the Shiromanī Akālī Dal decided to convene in the Indian capital a conference on February 20, 1949. The announcement was not looked upon with favour by the

Indian government. Certain Sikh leaders gone over to Congress, notably Sardār Baldev Singh, then a Central minister, were charged by the Home Minister Sardar Patel, to bring Master Tārā Singh round to calling off the convention. Master Tārā Singh refused to abandon the plan, though he agreed, by way of a compromise, to give the conclave the character of a religious *dīvān*. But the government was not conciliated and the Sikh leader was arrested at Narelā railway station on February 19, 1949, as he was travelling from Amritsar to Delhi. The news electrified the Sikh masses. The meeting did take place in Gurdwārā Rikābganj in Delhi. The temper was set by Master Tārā Singh's presidential address presented *in absentia*. His thesis was constructed around the statement: "We cannot gain political power without a firm faith in our religious heritage. Equally, our religious faith will wither away without political power." In Delhi, some other Sikh leaders were also arrested, among them the Akālī Dal's legal brains trust, Sardār Ajīt Singh Sarhadī, Sardār Amar Singh Dosānjh and Sardār Harcharan Singh Bājwā, who were the major speakers at the meeting.

Master Tārā Singh's arrest marked the beginning of another period of struggle for the Sikhs. Their most intimate concern at that moment was the retention of their historical and cultural individuality. Master Tārā Singh became the symbol of this urge. In political terms, this urge found expression in the demand for a Punjabi-speaking state. Proposals for readjustment of the boundaries of the Punjab with a view to securing a more balanced intercommunal power structure had emanated from Sikhs from time to time. They were in a stronger position now to demand division on the basis of language. Their numerical consolidation in a compact territory proved an incentive as well as an asset. The failure of the government to make the language of the people, i.e. Punjabi, the state language, provided them with their sharpest argument. The ruling party in the country was itself pledged to recasting the states linguistically. In the case of Sikhs, the demand for a language area had its religious connotation. But he who opposed it on this ground or on the ground that its acceptance would strengthen the Sikhs politically was himself betraying a sectarian predisposition. Master Tārā Singh drove the argument home untiringly.

A Punjabi-speaking state—Punjabi Sūbā, in popular

terminology—became the focus of Sikhs' political ambition. They pursued the demand with the full power of their will. They mobilized all their resources behind it and fought for it tooth and nail. A variety of tactics came into play. Widespread agitations were followed by negotiations across the table. Political manoeuvre alternated with electoral pressure. The Shiromanī Akālī Dal made Punjabi Sūbā the central plank in parliamentary elections and in the elections to the Shiromanī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee. The latter, confined to the Sikh electorate alone, became in effect communal plebiscites on the issue. Public demonstrations were punctuated with introvert spiritual contemplation. For the moral replenishment of the Akālī cadre, Master Tārā Singh held three such mass religious camps—Gurmat Mahā Samāgam at Amritsar (June 11, 1948), Gurmat Mahā Samāgam at Patiālā (September 1-2, 1951), and Jap Tap Samāgam at Anandpur Sāhib (July 16, 1953). In line with this style was the leaders' temporary withdrawal from the political scene and resort to seclusion for a life of penance and prayer. Sant Fateh Singh retired to the sacred sanctuary of Guru-kā-Lahore, near Anandpur, and remained in meditation for forty days (April 24, 1963 to June 2, 1963). Master Tārā Singh imposed upon himself a six-month exile (January 21, 1965, to July 24, 1965), spent in the quiet of a small hill village called Salogarā.

Conferences, conventions and *dīvāns* were accompanied with a steady stream of pamphleteering. Representations and memorials were supplemented by marches and processions. The critical sanction was obtained through gaol-going which had never been witnessed on this scale in the country before. Self-immolating fasts by the leaders in behalf of the demand were the extreme measures taken. These, without precedent in Sikh tradition, recoiled on the individuals concerned, but did succeed in arousing popular fervour.

Help came from Sikhs in other parts of India as well. This wide dispersal of the Sikh population was itself a new phenomenon. While it had consolidated the major proportion of it in the heartland of the Punjab, partition had also led to considerable migrations to remoter corners of the country. Sikh communities settled in foreign lands such as Malaysia, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Canada gave their full

support to the campaign for Punjabi Sūbā. They contributed funds and sent volunteers to join the *morchās*. Southeast-Asian Sikhs, for instance, assembled at Singapore on November 27, 1960, under the chairmanship of Sarban Singh of Tat Khālsā Dīwān, and constituted an action committee to aid the movement in the Punjab. In face of a national crisis or emergency, the temper changed. The Sikhs called a halt to the agitation and spontaneously lined themselves behind the government. This happened in 1962 at the time of the Chinese aggression and in 1965 when Pakistan marched its forces over the Indian frontier.

Another strategy which remained a persistent, though subordinate, *leitmotif* of the political plot was the easy passage of Akālīs into the Congress fold and their equally smooth retraction from it. During their consort with the Congress, the Akālī converts were able to have certain points conceded to the Sikhs. The seed of the Punjabi Sūbā was, for instance, sown by Giānī Kartār Singh, one of Master Tārā Singh's former colleagues, who, as a Congress minister in Bhīm Sen Sachar's government, had the Punjab demarcated into two discrete zones, one Punjabi-speaking and the other Hindi-speaking, for determining the media of instruction in schools. Political confirmation of these boundaries was the inevitable next step, though between these two there lay a whole era of severe strife and turmoil.

The greatest single asset was the person of Master Tārā Singh. He was the impelling force behind the movement. He supplied the inspiration as well as the argument. Besides being deeply religious, he had an acutely political mind. He was a born crusader—a fighter by instinct, possessing qualities of tenacity and fearlessness. With his fiery conviction, he kept alive the Sikhs' protest as well as their faith in their future. His capacity to rouse the masses and sustain their ardour was enormous. He couched his appeal in the religious vocabulary and symbolism of the Sikhs. Sikh nationalism spoke through Master Tārā Singh in its most intimate and authentic tones.

He was a tactician of acknowledged skill. He chose with care the issue to contest, and he chose his own moment to strike. He could easily separate the essential from the inessential, and excelled at exploiting the weaknesses of his adversaries and putting them in the wrong. He hammered at his point

remorselessly. Not a very eloquent speaker, he was a fluent writer and kept urging the Sikhs to their destiny through his newspaper columns, countless tracts and written addresses given at various Sikh assemblies. He could mix emotion with logic, religious appeal with political interest, and never lacked for ideas. A special trait was his invincibility. There were occasions when he was deserted by his friends and colleagues. There were occasions when he lay utterly mauled and defeated, but he rose, reassembled his forces and worked his way up again. After all the senior Akālī leaders had joined the Congress, he was left alone. But he did not wilt. Fortunately, some Sikh young men from the fold of the Sikh Students' Federation rallied to his support. Among them were Sarūp Singh, Amar Singh Ambālavī, Jaswant Singh Nekī, Gurmīt Singh, Bhān Singh, Bharpūr Singh, Satbīr Singh, Umrāo Singh, Jasdev Singh Sandhū, Manjīt Singh, Hardev Singh, Nirbhai Singh Dhillon and Bhāī Harbans Lāl.

New leaders sprang from among the Akālī ranks as well. At least two of them—Gurcharan Singh Tauhrā and Jagdev Singh Talwandī—proved their quality and calibre. Both came of farming stock, yet they were contrasts to each other in several ways. Gurcharan Singh Tauhrā (b. 1924) was sober, level-headed and urbane, whereas Jagdev Singh Talwandī (b. 1929) had a rugged and strident manner. Anyhow, they forged ahead by their solid and dedicated work among the masses. Another rising star was Lachhman Singh Gill (1917-1969), who had graduated into politics via real estate. Parkāsh Singh Bādal (b. 1926), scion of an old and wealthy Akālī family, stepped into the political arena straight from his college. His strong assets were his firm personal commitment and a clear vision.

Senior in age but new to politics was Sardār Hukam Singh, a lawyer of long standing. As a member of the Constituent Assembly and later as a member of Parliament, he exhibited an exceptional parliamentary talent. He became one of the principal theoreticians of the Punjabi Sūbā ideology and presented it to the elite as well as to the masses with his natural temperateness and finesse. Of legal background like Sardār Hukam Singh was Sardār Gurnām Singh (1899-1973) who joined the Akālī Dal upon his retirement from the Punjab High Court bench. He entered the Punjab Legislative Assembly on Akālī nomination

and proved an able leader of the Opposition, with remarkable fighting qualities and stamina. Another latecomer, who eventually snatched control of the movement from Master Tārā Singh's hands, was Sant Fateh Singh (1911-1972). He cast the Punjabi Sūbā demand into purely linguistic terms, divesting it of its religious overtones, and had it finally conceded by the Government of India.

Master Tārā Singh was also the principal fund-raiser. He took donations from his personal friends and landed and industrial interests in sympathy with the Akālī Dal. The legend commonly ran that every penny given him was a penny in safe trust. Master Tārā Singh provided the basic plank and the impulse, but did not worry himself about the details which were left to the younger men in command. But the overall direction of the campaign remained in his hands. He could be emotional and temperamental, but he never lost his dignity or his native culture. He kept the movement firmly under control and did not allow it ever to transgress the bounds of constitutionality or to surrender its peaceful and non-violent character. It is indeed noteworthy how large-scale agitations launched by him remained so completely exempt from violence.

Master Tārā Singh was still in gaol when Sardār Hukam Singh sent a memorial to the President of the Constituent Assembly, seeking "demarcation of a linguistic state on the basis of Punjabi." Upon his release not long afterwards, Master Tārā Singh precipitated the community into a determined posture over the issue. In a signed article contributed to the Punjabi monthly *Sant Sipāhī*, December 1949, he explicitly declared that whatever the name that might be given it, he wanted an area where Sikhs were free from the domination of the majority community—an area within the Indian Constitution, but having internal autonomy as did Kashmir. Another significant observation he made in the article was that he would not wish Patiālā and East Punjab States Union, a unit which had come into being with the amalgamation largely of the Sikh states of the Punjab, to merge into Punjabi Sūbā. He, in fact, proposed that Punjabi-speaking territories be joined with Patiālā and East Punjab States Union so that he "could more rightfully demand for it the status which Kashmir enjoys." An additional advantage, according to his argument, would be the

retention thereby of the Sikh traditions bequeathed to the Union by history. But most of the Akālī leaders had no emotional affinity for the princely Union and did not regret its eventual extinction. The state was merged with the Punjab in 1956, a decade before Punjabi Sūbā came into being. Master Tārā Singh's arguments failed to rescue it from its foredoomed end.

There were nearly 600 princely states in India at the time of Independence, only nine of them falling within the orbit of Pakistan. These states differed vastly in size, population and revenue. Most of them were too tiny to afford the basic infrastructure of a modern administration. Plans for uniting certain aspects of the administration of contiguous states had been undertaken by the mid-forties. Suggestions had, for instance, emanated from the political department of the Government of India for creating one high court for the states in the Punjab. To strengthen their individual claims for their share in the composition of a common high court, the states imported legal celebrities from outside. Patiālā, for instance, secured the services of Rājā Singh who, had been advocate-general in the North-West Frontier Province. Farīdkot got Mān Singh, a former chairman of the Gurdwārā Judicial Commission in the Punjab, and Nābhā brought in Ranbīr Singh, who held a high judicial position in Dholpur state and who later rose to the position of chief secretary in Patiālā and East Punjab States Union and subsequently to that of chairman of the Punjab Public Service Commission. But after Independence, events took a more drastic turn. Administrative integration envisaged by the British paved the way for the consolidation, by the Indian government, of princely states into bigger and more viable political units. The Punjab states—Patiālā, Nābhā, Jīnd, Farīdkot, Kapūrthalā, Kalsīā, Nālāgarh and Mālerkotlā—were merged together on May 5, 1948, to form what came to be known as Patiālā and East Punjab States Union (PEPSU). This process of consolidation of princely states brought to completion by Sardar Patel had its origin in the integration schemes drawn up by the Politioal Department under the British during the War days.

On November 1, 1956, PEPSU ceased to exist as a separate entity and became part of the larger state of the Punjab.

The Sikh conference at Ludhiānā on March 26, 1950, marked an important step towards mobilizing the Sikhs behind the demand for a Punjabi-speaking state. It turned out to be a massive rally. The president, Sardār Hukam Singh, gave a long, persuasive address. He made the point that Sikhs demanded the creation of a Punjabi-speaking state solely on the basis of language and that its denial for the reason that it would otherwise benefit them was arbitrary and unjust.

The Shiromanī Akālī Dal forced the issue by resolving to recall the Panthic members of the Punjab Legislative Assembly who had been permitted to join the Congress. This created a dilemma for the government as well as for the members concerned. The latter responded by defying the mandate; the former by resorting to punitive measures against the Akālīs. Giānī Kartār Singh, who was a minister in Gopī Chand Bhārgava's cabinet, was bent on having the recall resolution rescinded in the general body of the Akālī Dal through his own supporters. The government tried to intimidate Master Tārā Singh's followers and had the more active ones taken into custody. He himself was arrested on September 7, 1950, though his detention was overruled by the Punjab High Court and he had to be set at liberty. Only one member—Jaswant Singh Duggal—complied with the command of the Akālī Dal and forsook the Congress to return to its fold. Nevertheless, this was a subtle manoeuvre on the part of the Akālī Dal calculated to step up pressure for the Sikh demand.

The first general elections in the country held under the new Constitution in 1952 gave Akālī Dal the opportunity to take the issue to the voters. This was the main point on which they fought the elections in the Punjab as well as in PEPSU. Their success in terms of the number of seats won was not spectacular. The electorate being joint, the Congress was able to split the Sikh vote. In the Punjab, the Congress majority was impregnable though not in PEPSU. In PEPSU, the Congress government was outvoted on the opening day of the Assembly session. It was replaced by an Akālī-dominated ministry which took office in Patiālā on April 20, 1952. This was the first non-Congress government established anywhere in India.

CHAPTER XXV

MOMENT OF FULFILMENT

The Shiromaṇī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee elections in December 1954 returned a verdict totally in favour of Punjabi Sūbā. The electorate in this case was purely Sikh. Yet the Akālī Dal was stoutly opposed on the Punjabi Sūbā issue by the Khālsā Dal, a new party created by Congress Sikhs with the support of the government. The results went overwhelmingly in favour of the former. The Khālsā Dal was put to rout, its tally being a bare three seats out of the 132 contested. On the contrary, the Akālī Dal won all the 111 seats for which it had put up its candidates. The remaining seats went to those supported by the Dal—one Independent and seventeen Communists. Sikh solidarity on the question of Punjabi Sūbā was a proven fact.

The Congress government remained inflexible. By its own past decisions, the Indian National Congress was pledged to reconstituting the provinces on a linguistic basis. The Madras session of the Congress in 1927 had lent support to the demand for demarcating Sind as a separate province. The resolution adopted declared: "The Congress is of the opinion that the time has come for the redistribution of the provinces on linguistic basis, a principle that has been adopted in the constitution of the Congress. This Congress is also of the opinion that such re-adjustment of provinces be immediately taken in hand and that any province which demands such reconstitution on the linguistic basis be dealt with accordingly."

The Nehru Report of 1928 had stated that "the present distribution of the provinces of India is on no rational basis. It is merely by accident that a particular area fell in a particular province." About the principle that should govern the

redistribution of the provincial boundaries, the Nehru Report gave priority to "the linguistic unity of the area concerned."

Jawaharlal Nehru had himself made a statement on April 4, 1946, that "redistribution of provincial boundaries was essential and inevitable. I stand for semi-autonomous units as well. . . . I should like them [the Sikhs] to have a semi-autonomous unit within the province so that they may experience the glow of freedom."

Yet the Congress government was stubbornly set against the demand for a Punjabi-speaking state. The drafting committee of the Constituent Assembly had recommended that a commission be appointed to enquire into all relevant matters not only as regards Andhra but also as regards other linguistic areas. But later, in June 1948, the President of the Constituent Assembly was advised to appoint a "commission to examine and report on the formation of the provinces of Andhra, Karnataka, Kerala and Maharashtra." A commission with this limited responsibility was constituted. Although northern India was excluded from its jurisdiction, the commission foreclosed the possibility of the creation of a Punjabi-speaking state. It wrote in its report: "The formation of linguistic provinces is sure to give rise to a demand for the separation of other linguistic groups elsewhere. Claims have already been made by Sikhs, Jats and others and these demands will in due course of time be intensified and become live issues if once the issue of the formation of linguistic provinces is decided upon." Besides adumbrating the "hazards" involved in the extension of the linguistic principle in recasting the provinces, the commission lent credibility to the viewpoint of the communal majority in the Punjab which was equating a religious minority with a linguistic group.

A still worse shock came from the report of the States Reorganization Commission appointed in 1953. To baulk the demand for a Punjabi Sūbā, the Commission recommended the integration of PEPSU and Himachal Pradesh with the Punjab. Under what prepossessions the Commission functioned would be evident from the proceedings of a sitting at Patiālā. Pandit H.N. Kunzrū, one of the members, asked the Sikh spokesman, Sardār Hukam Singh, why he had included Kāngrā and other Hindi-speaking areas in the proposed Punjabi state. Sardār

Hukam Singh answered that, if they were Hindi-speaking, they might be excluded. Pandit Kunzrū objected that, in that case, the Sikhs would be turned into a majority. Sardār Hukam Singh trapped him retorting quick-wittedly that, if the Commission had been instructed to keep Sikhs in a minority, they must well obey. Pandit Kunzrū had no escape from the impasse into which he had been driven.

The growing tension exploded into an open conflict with the government in the summer of 1955. April 14 was the day for the annual Baisākhī march for the Sikhs in Amritsar. The Punjab government imposed a ban on the shouting of slogans in support of Punjabi Sūbā. Slogans for Mahā (Greater) Punjab by opponents of the Akālī Dal were also forbidden, but the order was primarily aimed at preventing the Sikhs from uttering Punjabi Sūbā slogans in their Baisākhī procession. The Sikhs refused to submit to the ban. The march did take place and voices were raised demanding Punjabi Sūbā. The police put under arrest more than a dozen leading Akālīs.

The Shiromanī Akālī Dal continued to protest against the ban as an attack on the civic rights of the people. It gave an ultimatum that, if the ban was not withdrawn by May 10, 1955, it would launch a mass agitation. On May 10, Master Tārā Singh led out the first batch of ten volunteers in defiance of the ban. He was detained along with his companions. This was the beginning of a long-drawn contest. The Sikhs started pouring into Amritsar in large numbers to court arrest. The strength of the batches offering themselves for arrest had to be increased from 10 to 100. Master Tārā Singh's birthday on June 24 was commemorated by accelerating the number still further. The arrests continued from day to day. Among those held were the Head Granthī of the Golden Temple as well as Jathedār of the Akāl Takht, Sardār Iqbāl Singh (1889-1974), an eminent educationist and a college principal, who was in the absence of Sardār Hukam Singh abroad officiating as president of the Akālī Dal, and who was commander of the *morchā*, Parkāsh Singh Bādal, along with his brother Gurdās Singh and uncle Gurrāj Singh, Sarūp Singh, Gurmit Singh, Bhopinder Singh Mānn, Dhannā Singh Gulshan, Gangā Singh, principal of the Sikh Missionary College, Sādhū Singh Hamdard, eminent Sikh journalist, Rājinder Singh of Sangrūr and Chaudhrī Kartār

Singh. Many more filled the gaols. They included legislators, writers and lawyers. Totally, 12,000 were taken prisoners, among them 427 women.

The government further tightened its repressive network. The Golden Temple was besieged by the police and Guru-kā-Langar occupied. Meetings and *dīvāns* at Manjī Sāhib, in the Golden Temple precincts, were prohibited. The worst happened on July 4, 1955, when police entered the sacred precincts in a body and exploded tear bombs to scatter the assembled Sikhs. This was a trespass without precedent in history. On July 5, Bāwā Harkishan Singh, president of the Shiromanī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee, and Sardār Hukam Singh were taken into custody. But government soon realized the enormity of the outrage committed, and retraced its policy. The band of Sikh volunteers which turned out on July 8 shouting Punjabi Sūbā slogans was left untouched by the police. The following day, a group of 139 ladies, under the leadership of Bībī Giān Kaur of Calcutta, volunteered for arrest. Again, police did not interfere. On July 12, the ban was formally withdrawn. The chief minister, Bhīm Sen Sachar, presented himself at the Akāl Takht and made in an open *dīvān* apologies on behalf of the government for the sacrilege committed by the police on July 4.

This was a graceful act much applauded by the Sikhs. But the goodwill generated by Shrī Sachar's sincerity was dissipated in the wake of the publication of the report of the States Reorganization Commission. The Commission had totally rejected the Sikhs' demand and advised them, on the contrary, to accept a larger Punjab to be constituted by the amalgamation of Himachal Pradesh with the existing Punjab. "From the point of view of the Sikhs themselves," it wrote, "the solution that we propose offers the advantage that the precarious and uncertain political majority which they seek will be exchanged for the real and substantial rights which a sizable and vigorous minority with a population ratio of nearly one-third is bound to have in the united Punjab in the whole of which they have a real stake." The argument was as unintelligible to the Sikhs as it was derogatory.

Master Tārā Singh grasped the opportunity to exhibit Sikh unity and resolution. He summoned a representative congress

of the Sikhs at Amritsar on October 16, 1955. Nearly 1,300 of the invitees attended. With one voice, they rejected the recommendations of the States Reorganization Commission and vehemently castigated it for treating the Sikh claims with undisguised bias. The convention authorized Master Tārā Singh to devise ways and means to bring home to the Government of India Sikhs' sense of injury. His first move—a conciliatory one—was to call upon Prime Minister Nehru. The ground for such a meeting had already been prepared by the former Defence Minister, Sardār Baldev Singh. Baldev Singh, who had shunned meeting the Prime Minister since he was dropped from his cabinet and who in fact stayed away even from social get-togethers at which he was likely to be present, was persuaded by Giānī Kartār Singh and others to act as a mediator between the Akālīs and the government. He showed Jawaharlal Nehru the correspondence which had passed between Sikhs and the Muslim League leaders prior to the transfer of power, and reminded him how the former had rejected the League overtures and thrown in their lot with India. Sardār Hukam Singh carried to the Prime Minister a letter written by Master Tārā Singh, and October 24, 1955, was the date fixed for a bilateral meeting.

Conciliatory intercession brought Jawaharlal Nehru and the Sikh leaders round the conference table. In these parleys, the Prime Minister was assisted by two of his cabinet colleagues, Maulānā Abul Kalām Āzād and Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant. The Sikhs were represented by Master Tārā Singh, Giānī Kartār Singh, Sardār Hukam Singh, Bhāī Jodh Singh and Sardār Giān Singh Rārewālā. A sixth colleague of theirs, Bāwā Harkishan Singh, did not participate in the negotiations, but joined their own private discussions afterwards. All of them put up in Sardār Hukam Singh's house in Delhi, and, before leaving for the first day's meeting, they vowed in the presence of the Guru Granth that they would act by mutual counsel and that none of them would meet singly any member of the government. The members also apportioned among themselves the topics. Master Tārā Singh was to say a few opening words and was not to speak again. Bhāī Jodh Singh was to explicate the language problem in the Punjab, and Giānī Kartār Singh and Sardār Hukam Singh were to meet the

political points. The first meeting took place on October 24, 1955, the second a month later—on November 23. This second meeting was preceded by Prime Minister Nehru's lunch for Master Tārā Singh. At the end of the meeting, the Press asked Master Tārā Singh if he had obtained the Punjabi Sūbā. "I have not at least lost it," he rejoined promptly. The parleys were interrupted at the end of December as a general session of the Indian National Congress was announced to be held in Amritsar on February 11-12, 1956.

In an impromptu, but dramatic gesture, the Shiromanī Akālī Dal gave notice of a parallel conference of its own. As subsequent events proved, this turned out to be efficient strategy. The Sikh meeting was massive in size. The entire Punjab countryside seemed to have burst upon the city of Amritsar. The Akālī cavalcade preceding the deliberation was a magnificent spectacle of Sikh solidarity—an endless column of marching humanity fired with one single passion, with one single will. It completely dwarfed the Congress convention. The Indian leaders watched from across the road the mammoth turnout of the Sikh populace. They could not have been but struck by its perfect orderliness and its sense of purpose.

Beckoning the processionists on and ever urging them to a quicker pace to be on time was Giānī Kartār Singh, proudly standing in a jeep, his broken arm in a sling and his eyes alight with an unmistakable glint of triumph. He had but lately returned to the Akālī Dal to strengthen the hands of Master Tārā Singh.

Most graphic is the account of this Sikh march in Michael Brecher's biography of Jawaharlal Nehru:

> On a bright, cool north Indian winter morning the contending groups massed their forces in a show of strength, especially for the benefit of the Congress High Command which was camped close by. First came the Sikhs in the most impressive—and peaceful—demonstration I have ever seen. Hour after hour and mile after mile they marched, eight abreast, down the main streets of Amritsar, a hallowed name in Indian nationalism because of the shootings of 1919. Old and young, men and women, they came in an endless stream, most with an expression of determination and sadness in their eyes, many still remembering the ghastly days of 1947 when their homeland was cut in two and hundreds of thousands fled

> before the Muslims, and when thousands of their co-religionists died or were maimed. What strength there was in the appearance of the older men who, with their flowing beards, looked like the Hebrew prophets of old! Many carried their traditional sword, the *kirpan*, and many wore blue turbans, symbol of militancy. (The dyers in the city did a handsome business that week.) They had come from the villages and towns of the Punjab and from far-off places as well. Almost without exception they marched in orderly file, portraying their unity of purpose. At intervals came the resounding cry, "Punjabi Suba Zindabad" ("Long live a Punjabi State") and "Master Tara Singh Zindabad," with intermittent music to enliven the proceedings. On they came, for five hours. Few who watched them could doubt their genuine fear of being swallowed up in the vice-like embrace of rabid Hinduism. By conservative estimate they numbered over 100,000. To this observer it seemed more like double that figure.

The Sikhs had put forth their strongest argument in support of Punjabi Sūbā. The dialogue between the Akālī leaders and the government was resumed. What began to irk the former was the monotonous style the meetings had acquired. The Sikh leaders did all the speaking and the government representatives only listened. Pandit Pant, who was meant to be the chief government spokesman, never uttered a word from his lips. The Sikh delegation felt frustrated and decided to cease from participating. News appeared in the Press on the morning of February 26, 1956, that the negotiations had broken down. The report was accompanied with the announcement that the Sikh leaders were leaving Delhi. But Joginder Singh, a Sikh member of Parliament from Uttar Pradesh, who sat in the meetings as an observer, tried to bring them round to re-joining the talks. Master Tārā Singh, who had shifted from Sardār Hukam Singh's residence to Lālā Sohan Lāl's in Golf Links, spoke to Jawaharlal on telephone and the meetings were resumed.

The negotiators were at length able to devise a scheme to break the impasse. It was at best a compromise solution. Without demarcating a Punjabi Sūbā, the state was to be split into two regions—Punjabi and Hindi. Each zone was to have its regional committee consisting of its own share of the Punjabi legislators, with powers to deliberate on all subjects except law and order, finance and taxation. This Regional Formula, as the plan came to be designated, was put to the

vote at a general meeting of the Shiromanī Akālī Dal at Amritsar on March 11, 1956. There were critical voices raised. The angriest was that of Amar Singh Ambālavī, who had his dissent formally recorded. Gurmīt Singh did not go that far, but opposed the proposal. In the same lobby was another youth leader, Karnail Singh Doad, who was then a member of the Working Committee of the Shiromanī Akālī Dal. A stickler for constitutional propriety, he privately raised with some of the sponsors the cavil that the Formula could not be discussed in that meeting without having been put up first to the Working Committee. The objection went unheeded by the leaders who were committed to seeing the Formula through. Especially persuasive at the meeting were Giānī Kartār Singh, Bhāī Jodh Singh and Sardār Ajīt Singh Sarhadī. Giānī Kartār Singh conceded that what had been offered by government was not the Punjabi Sūbā of their conception. Yet he commended acceptance of it as a *shagan* or promise for Punjabi Sūbā.

The motion was carried, but one man who was left somewhat puzzled was Master Tārā Singh. He was not sure if they had acted prudently. Once again the Akālīs were permitted to join the Congress. Once again Master Tārā Singh questioned in his heart of hearts the wisdom of so enfeebling the Akālī Dal. His instinct inclined him to oppose the half-measure that had emerged from government-Akālī *detente*. But he did not want to overrule his colleagues. He, nevertheless, continued to feel sceptical. He himself did not join the Congress, although most of his front-rank colleagues did. On September 30, 1956, the Akālī Dal renounced politics. It was proposed to hold a rally a few weeks later and present two lakh Akālī members to the Congress. Master Tārā Singh's unease was not lessened.

The 1957 general elections gave him the opportunity to end his mental dichotomy. The Congress had assigned the Akālī entrants twenty-two nominations for the Punjab Assembly and three for Parliament. This share struck Master Tārā Singh as inadequate and he abrogated the settlement with the Congress so far as he was personally concerned. In his individual capacity, he put up his own candidates against Congress nominees. None of the twenty-three fielded by him won, but he had underwritten the point once again that Sikhs must be the masters of their political fortune. He was left alone as he had been in

1948 when all the senior Akālī leaders had joined the Congress. This was the situation in which he found himself now in 1957. His one advantage now, as in the past, was his control of the Shiromanī Akālī Dal. He started on the course of recovery by reactivating it politically.

The supporters of Hindi assailed the Regional Formula as being harmful to their interests. Under the aegis of the Hindi Rakshā Samitī, they launched a fierce agitation to have it annulled. The new Congress government which had taken office in the Punjab on April 3, 1957, with the mighty Sardār Partāp Singh Kairon as Chief Minister and former Akālīs, Giānī Kartār Singh and Sardār Giān Singh Rārewālā, as two of the members of his cabinet, dealt with the Hindi protest firmly. But it could do little to assuage the Sikhs' sentiment hurt by the Hindi Rakshā Samitī's acts of animosity against them. During the course of the Hindi movement, several Sikh places of worship had been desecrated.

Language frontiers had become communal frontiers. For Master Tārā Singh, Punjabi Sūbā was the only antidote to the rising Hindi fanaticism. On June 14, 1958, he resurrected the demand for it, repudiating the Regional Formula which had anyhow been the subject of his criticism and sarcasm. Though accepted under the pressure of circumstances, the Regional Formula was no trustworthy solution of the Punjab problem. The Sikh masses were scarcely enthused by it. Essentially, it was a tentative arrangement and, as it soon became apparent, neither the government nor any of the political parties was keen to give it an earnest trial. Master Tārā Singh called a meeting of the general body of the Shiromanī Akālī Dal at Patiālā on February 14, 1959. 299 out of 377 members attended. The convention resolved by one voice to restore the political character of the Dal.

The Regional Formula, never seriously put into effect by government and never seriously accepted by the Sikhs, left one permanent monument in the shape of the Punjabi University. The idea of such a university had taken birth in the new intellectual and cultural milieu created by national independence. Educators and public men in the Punjab vaguely spoke of a university for the development and promotion of the language of the state. But none could define exactly the scope and design

of such a university. The first concrete formulation came from the Punjabi Sahit Akademi, which at its annual conference in Delhi, in 1956, adopted a resolution demanding that a university with Punjabi as the medium of instruction be set up in the Punjab.

Most crucial, though generally covert, was the part of Giānī Kartār Singh, who was one of the architects of the Regional Formula. He was then a minister in Partāp Singh Kairon's government. One of his close associates, Sardār Ram Dyāl Singh, proposed in the Punjabi Regional Committee a resolution for Punjabi being adopted as the exclusive medium of instruction in schools in the Punjabi zone. Certain sections felt perturbed and pressed Giānī Kartār Singh to have the motion withdrawn. Giānī Kartār Singh agreed on the condition that the leader of the House, Pandit Mohan Lāl, make an announcement for the establishment of a university in the name of Punjabi. Mohan Lāl held hurried consultations with the Chief Minister who, under the provisions of the Formula, did not sit in either of the regional committees. In seeking his concurrence, he said that Giānī Kartār Singh had told him that the establishment of such a university was provided for in the Regional Formula. No one had the time to go into the details. Partāp Singh gave his approval and Mohan Lāl declared on the floor of the House that the government would initiate measures to bring into being a Punjabi university.

Later, as the Regional Formula was studied to locate the pertinent provision, it was discovered that none existed. Confronted on this point, Giānī Kartār Singh told the Chief Minister that the development of Punjabi language was an important aspect of the policy on which the Regional Formula was based. How would, he asked the Chief Minister, the language develop if such a university was not established. The humour of the situation was not lost on Sardār Partāp Singh. In any case, he was himself a protagonist of Punjabi. His own cultural perceptions and affiliations were derived from the Singh Sabhā enlightenment in which his father, Nihāl Singh, had been a prominent figure. In private conversation and in public speech, he used to refer proudly to his Singh Sabhā upbringing. Although his regime as Chief Minister was marked by severe repression of the Akālīs, he gave the Sikhs a

dominant position in the administration of the Punjab, and took the ruling Congress party into rural Punjab, tilting the leadership structure decisively in their favour. With his characteristic resoluteness, Partāp Singh now went forward with his plans for the establishment of the university.

Soon afterwards he and his cabinet colleagues happened to be in Patiālā for the Bhog ceremonies for the mother of Mahārājā Yādavindra Singh. There the Chief Minister requested the Mahārājā to accept the chairmanship of Punjabi University Commission the state government had decided to appoint. The Mahārājā agreed. Among other members of the Commission nominated were Bhāī Jodh Singh, Sardār Hukam Singh, Sardār Ujjal Singh, Malik Hardit Singh, Dr A.C. Joshī, Dr Anūp Singh, Dr P.S. Gill and Hardwārī Lāl. The commission submitted its report to the government in 1961 and, during the same year, legislation was passed. In 1962, the University opened in one of the old Patiālā palaces.

The Punjab government, under Partāp Singh Kairon, was as inflexible before the supporters of Punjabi as it had been before the supporters of Hindi. In the affairs of the former, it intervened more directly via Giānī Kartār Singh who was now a minister in the Kairon government. Master Tārā Singh was outmanoeuvred in the annual election to the office of president of the Shiromanī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee on November 16, 1958, and defeated by 77 votes to 74. The victor was a young man, Prem Singh Lālpurā, barely in his thirties. Master Tārā Singh reacted by giving the signal for a Punjabi Sūbā conference to be convened in Chandīgarh. At the conference, he disclosed his intention of launching a mass movement on a vast scale. In preparation, a silent procession was to be taken out in Delhi on March 15, 1959. The government acted swiftly and took him into custody. The Delhi march did take place, with Sikhs participating from all over the country. The procession, led by Master Tārā Singh's portrait displayed on a vehicle, ended in a religious *dīvān* at Gurdwārā Rikābganj. Within less than a week, Master Tārā Singh was released from gaol.

The 1960 elections to the Shiromanī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee turned out to be another trial of strength between the Congress and the Akālīs. Congress Sikhs, led by Partāp

Singh Kairon and Giānī Kartār Singh, strove hard to defeat Master Tārā Singh and his nominees. Giānī Kartār Singh resigned from the cabinet to apply all his energies to electioneering. With the overt help of the state government, he sponsored a society called Sādh Sangat Board to contest the elections. But the results went overwhelmingly in favour of the Shiromanī Akālī Dal. The Dal took 136 seats, contrasting with Sādh Sangat Board's four. All the Akālī members assembled at the Akāl Takht on June 24, 1960, to bind themselves solemnly to achieve Punjabi Sūbā.

The Akālī Dal carried its campaign a step further by calling upon former Akālī members to withdraw from the Punjab Legislative Assembly. Only five out of 24 resigned at the behest of the Akālī Dal. They were Sardār Sarūp Singh, Sardār Ātmā Singh, Sardār Hargurnād Singh, Sardār Ūdham Singh and Master Partāp Singh. Undismayed, Master Tārā Singh summoned a broad-based Punjabi Sūbā convention in Amritsar on May 22, 1960, to which members of Swatantra and Parjā Socialist parties were also invited. The conference was presided over by Pandit Sundar Lāl, and Dr Saifuddīn Kitchlew, once a staunch Congressman, opened the proceedings. The main resolution was moved by Sardār Gurnām Singh, calling upon the government "not to delay any more the inevitable formation" of a Punjabi-speaking state, especially when language-based states had been carved out in other parts of the country.

Close on the heels of the Amritsar convention, came Master Tārā Singh's proclamation to start upon a march on May 29, 1960, which was the day of Guru Arjun's martyrdom, through the Punjab countryside and reach Delhi to join a Sikh procession in the capital on June 12, 1960. On the way, he was to visit important Sikh gurdwārās and make speeches to rally support for Punjabi Sūbā. This announcement led him into gaol once again. He was picked up by police from his home in Amritsar on the night of May 24-25 and taken to Dharmsālā gaol. The government came down upon the Akālīs with a heavy hand. Large-scale arrests were made throughout the Punjab. A reign of terror ensued. The Sikhs once again exhibited their usual fondness for gaol-going. *Jathās* started courting arrest at Amritsar as well as at Delhi. The main

centre of mobilization was the Golden Temple. The evening *dīvāns* at Manjī Sāhib attracted vast audiences. Akālī leaders made stirring speeches asserting the Sikhs' right to self-determination. In the absence of Master Tārā Singh, Sant Fateh Singh, a man devoted to religion who had but lately been initiated into politics, directed the movement from inside the Golden Temple precincts. He was assisted by a devoted band of young men from the Sikh Students' Federation such as Satbīr Singh, Bharpūr Singh and Bhān Singh. Satbīr Singh was a favourite speaker at the Manjī Sāhib *dīvāns*. By his eloquent narration of deeds of heroism and martyrdom from Sikh history, he maintained mass fervour at a high pitch.

Sant Fateh Singh proved to be a man marked out for politics. He took to his new role with sovereign facility and stuck to it with a rare tenacity of will. He gave evidence of a shrewd practical judgement, uncommon for one reared as a religious recluse. He held the strings of the *morchā* firmly in his hands and ran it with the finesse of a seasoned leader of men. By his circumspection in speech, he introduced a new convincing note into the agitation. He presented the demand for Punjabi Sūbā as based on linguistic considerations alone, bringing it in line with the country's goals of democracy and secularism. Besides the Sikh masses, he won many from other communities over to his viewpoint. For him the size of the new state or the proportion of Hindu and Sikh populations in it was not of primary relevance. What mattered was the creation of a unit comprising Punjabi-speaking areas, with Punjabi as the official language. Sant Fateh Singh handled the media with the skill and aplomb of a born statesman. He never faltered in the consistency of his argument, nor did he ever lose his equanimity or run into a *faux pas*. Talking once to the Press at Amritsar during the course of the *morchā*, he said, "We do not seek a Sikh-majority area. We are not concerned about percentages. We want the Punjabi Sūbā to comprise an area where Punjabi language is spoken, regardless of the fact whether the Sikhs are in a majority or minority." This was the burden of his speech and statement, always.

The state government resorted to rigorous measures to put

down the agitation. A scare was created throughout the Punjab, but the supply of volunteers continued unabated and the *morchā* went from strength to strength. Thousands of Sikhs had lodged themselves in gaols, and the number kept multiplying. On its side, the government showed little sign of relenting. It seemed an endless contest, when Sant Fateh Singh, in a conclusive bid, put his own life at stake. On October 29, he wrote a letter to Prime Minister Nehru saying that, if the Sikhs' democratic and constitutional demand for a Punjabi-speaking state was not conceded, he would go on a fast-unto-death. He sought to impress upon him the Sikhs' sense of grievance and to tell him how repressive and vengeful the Punjab government had been. Jawaharlal Nehru refused to intervene, and Sant Fateh Singh unhesitatingly took up his cross.

The fast began on December 18, 1960. Before entering his ascetical hut in the Golden Temple premises, Sant Fateh Singh had the *ardās* said at Akāl Takht by the Jathedār praying God to give him strength to carry his resolve through, and made obeisance at the Harimandir receiving his last portion of *karāhprasād*. He also addressed a mammoth gathering of the Sikhs, adjuring them to remain peaceful in any event. "Every particle of the country is ours and any damage to it is damage to ourselves," he told them. A roster was announced of ten Sikhs who had offered to continue the chain in case Sant Fateh Singh's fast ended in a fatality.

Suddenly a grimness hung over the country. The air was filled with foreboding. There was universal applause for the purity of Sant Fateh Singh's motive and no one questioned the steadfastness of his resolution. Yet everybody prayed that the worst might somehow be averted. This was Sant Fateh Singh's finest hour. But immolation by fasting was a novelty in Sikh tradition. In this strategy lay the germ of many an internal conflict and of the eclipse of many a reputation.

Indian leaders of diverse opinion tried to intervene and persuade Sant Fateh Singh to abandon the fast. But he would not withdraw from his self-imposed ordeal until the justice of his point was admitted. The concern daily grew in the entire nation and there was anxiety everywhere to save his life. Prime Minister Nehru, in a speech in Chandīgarh on December

20, 1960, conceded that Punjabi was the dominant language of the Punjab and that it must be promoted in every way. The same assurance was repeated in a speech at Rājpurā later in the day. This and an even more conciliatory speech given by him in Delhi on December 31, making a personal appeal to Sant Fateh Singh to end his fast, were judged by the latter as falling short of his stipulation. So the stalemate continued.

Chief Minister Partāp Singh Kairon made a bold gesture and set Master Tārā Singh free on January 4, 1961. This was done on the advice of Bhāī Jodh Singh, his old teacher of college days, with whom he often took counsel in moments of crisis. Immediately after his release from gaol in Dharmsālā, Master Tārā Singh called on Sant Fateh Singh, considerably weakened from his trial. He next wanted to meet Prime Minister Nehru, who was then in Bhāvnagar attending the annual session of the Congress. Not wishing to lose any time, he flew from Delhi in a specially chartered plane to Bhāvnagar. He was accompanied by Harbans Singh Gujrāl, Lachhman Singh Gill, Hargurnād Singh, Harcharan Singh of Bhatindā, and Seth Rām Nāth, one Punjabi Hindu of consequence who openly espoused the case for a Punjabi-speaking state. The group held mutual consultations while in flight and reduced their minimum demand to writing. Master Tārā Singh had a two-hour meeting with the Prime Minister on January 7, 1961, but without securing anything worth reporting to Sant Fateh Singh. On January 8, 1961, Jawaharlal added a postscript to what he had told Master Tārā Singh. He announced that "it is not out of any discrimination against Punjab or distrust of the Sikhs that the process of forming a linguistic state was not possible after applying it elsewhere." "Punjab state," he went on, "is broadly speaking a Punjabi Sūbā with Punjabi as the dominant language." He expressed his anxiety about Sant Fateh Singh's health and wished to see his ordeal ended.

Master Tārā Singh, who had returned to Delhi, felt reassured by this elaboration and forthwith had a call made to Amritsar. He assured Sant Fateh Singh that the obligations of his vow had been fulfilled and asked him to terminate his fast. To Master Tārā Singh's appeal was added the weight of

a motion adopted by the Working Committee of the Akālī Dal and the command of the Panj Piāre or the Five Elect who, speaking for the entire Khālsā, told Sant Fateh Singh that they were satisfied that his pledge had been complied with and that he must forthwith end his fast. On the morning of January 9, 1961, Fateh Singh took his first sips of nourishment in twenty-two days—a glass of juice from the hands of Bhāī Chet Singh, one of the Golden Temple *granthīs*. This marked the end of the seven-month-long *morchā* in which, according to official figures, 30,000 went to gaol and, according to Akālī reckoning, 57,129.

Political negotiations ensued between the government and the Akālīs. Sant Fateh Singh had three meetings with Prime Minister Nehru—one on February 8, 1961, the next on March 1, 1961, and the last on May 12, 1961. The meetings were friendly, but yielded no definite results. Offering to extend to the Punjabi language all the protection it needed, the Prime Minister was not willing to slice off Punjabi-speaking areas of the Punjab into a separate state. The Sikhs were far from pacified. To press home the Punjabi Sūbā issue, another fast had to be staged—this time by Master Tārā Singh. His trial began on August 15, 1961, after a solemn prayer in front of the Akāl Takht. The Punjab again was in a commotion. The crisis deepened as days went by. Mediators arose to try and settle the issue. Notable among them were Mahārājā Yādavindra Singh of Patiālā and Malik Hardit Singh. They kept in touch with Prime Minister Nehru and Home Minister Lāl Bahādur Shāstrī on the one hand and with the Akālī leaders on the other. Eventually Master Tārā Singh was persuaded to end his fast on the 48th day (October 1, 1961). The glass of lemon juice, mixed with honey, was given him by the Mahārājā of Patiālā and Sant Fateh Singh.

In pursuance of the settlement made, the Prime Minister appointed a commission to go into the question of Sikh grievances. The Shiromanī Akālī Dal cavilled at its composition and refused to put up its case before it. But the commission carried on with its work in spite of Akālī Dal's non-cooperation. It gave its report on February 9, 1962, rejecting suggestions of any discrimination against the Sikhs. Demand for a Punjabi-speaking state was, according to the

commission, a camouflage for the demand for a Sikh state.

Among the Sikhs, criticism was brewing against Master Tārā Singh himself. His termination of his fast without achieving the target aimed at had made him liable to public accountability as never before. The accusation was commonly levelled that he had perjured the pledge solemnized at Akāl Takht. The Sikhs were not willing to condone what amounted to violation of a religious vow and what seemed to cast a slur on their proud tradition. The responsibility for having Sant Fateh Singh's fast similarly ended was also laid at Master Tārā Singh's door. Five Sikhs eminent in the religious hierarchy—Jathedār Achhar Singh of the Akāl Takht, Jathedār Sharam Singh of Srī Kesgarh Sāhib, Giānī Bhupinder Singh, Head Granthī of the Harimandir, Bhāī Kartār Singh and Bhāī Chet Singh—were named as Panj Piāre on November 24, 1961, to judge if the oath sworn by Master Tārā Singh had been adhered to. They made a close investigation of the circumstances leading to the abandonment of the fast and pronounced Master Tārā Singh guilty of having gone back on his plighted word and of having blemished thereby the Sikh tradition of religious steadfastness and sacrifice.

Master Tārā Singh was laid under expiation to have an *akhandpāth* of the Guru Granth recited at the Akāl Takht, to say for one month an extra *pāth* of the *Japujī* every day in addition to his normal *nitnem* or prescribed regimen of five daily prayers, to offer *karāhprasād* of the value of Rs 125 and to clean the shoes of the *sangat* and the dishes in the Guru-kā-Langar for five days. As Jathedār Achhar Singh and Giānī Bhupinder Singh explained on behalf of the religious jury, they had no comments to make on Sant Fateh Singh's fast which, they said, had been given up with the consent of Master Tārā Singh and under the orders of the Working Committee of the Akālī Dal, Panj Piāre and the *sangat* in general. He was, nevertheless, held guilty, along with other eight members of the Working Committee, for acquiescing in Master Tārā Singh's breaking his fast. Sant Fateh Singh was to recite for one month an additional *pāth* of the *Japujī* and wash dishes in Guru-kā-Langar for five days. Other members of the Working Committee got off with a lighter penance.

They were to broom the Golden Temple precincts and clean dishes in Guru-kā-Langar for two days.

The verdict was announced on November 29, 1961, and the sanctions imposed were dutifully complied with. Master Tārā Singh's pictures scrubbing dishes in the Guru-kā-Langar and cleaning the shoes of the *sangat* were widely circulated. These acts of humility and expiation evoked spontaneous popular admiration, but Master Tārā Singh could not climb up the ladder again. Sant Fateh Singh had emerged as a serious rival. The story of Sikh affairs henceforward is the story of the gradual eclipse of Master Tārā Singh and the steady ascendancy of Sant Fateh Singh. Already the former's authority had been challenged, with the charge flung at him that he was responsible for having the Sant's pledge falsified. On January 11, 1961—two days after Sant Fateh Singh had broken his fast—Master Tārā Singh was booed by the audience at a *dīvān* at Manjī Sāhib and not allowed to make a speech. At the Māghī *dīvān* at Muktsar on January 13, 1961, the entire festival crowd stood up in protest, forcing him to break off abruptly. Jathedār Jīwan Singh Umrānangal, a member of the Akālī Dal Working Committee, notified Master Tārā Singh on November 15, 1961, to vacate presidentship of the Shiromanī Akālī Dal as well as that of the Shiromanī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee. He counted ten charges against him and declared that, if he did not resign by November 20, he would sit on a fast. Master Tārā Singh retaliated by suspending from the Akālī Dal Jīwan Singh and his associates such as Lachhman Singh Gill and Jagdev Singh Talwandī. Jīwan Singh began his fast on November 21 in front of the offices of the Shiromanī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee. But a patchwork settlement was arrived at two days later. Umrānangal gave up his fast and the suspension orders against him and others were withdrawn.

A semblance of unity was maintained at a general meeting of the Shiromanī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee called on November 30, 1961, to elect new office-bearers, a temporary protest walkout by Harcharan Singh Hudiārā and his group notwithstanding. Master Tārā Singh was re-elected president, with Kirpāl Singh Chakksherewālā as senior vice-president, Harcharan Singh Hudiārā as vice-president and Lachhman Singh Gill as general secretary. The Shiromanī Akālī Dal went

into the 1962 general elections in the same state of simmering dissension. It could carry no more than 19 Punjab Legislative Assembly seats.

Jīwan Singh Umrānangal and Lachhman Singh Gill, both supporters of Sant Fateh Singh, continued their criticism of Master Tārā Singh. They rejected the party elections held under his presidentship as fraudulent. Master Tārā Singh suspended them for indiscipline on July 4, 1962, and summoned on July 16 a meeting of the Working Committee of the Akālī Dal which ratified these expulsions. Sant Fateh Singh issued a public statement the following day challenging the decision. He fixed July 22 for a general convention of the Sikhs at Gurdwārā Mushkiānā, near Mullānpur in Ludhiānā district. The assembly, attended among others by 78 of the 155 members of the Shiromanī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee and 8 of the 19 Akālī members of the Punjab Legislative Assembly, led to the birth of a parallel Akālī Dal.

Master Tārā Singh summoned on August 18, 1962, the general body of the original Akālī Dal. Lachhman Singh Gill notified a meeting of the rival Akālī Dal for the same day. The latter, comprising 200 delegates of the Shiromanī Akālī Dal, 72 circle *jathedārs* and 9 members of the Punjab Legislative Assembly, met in front of the Akāl Takht. Sant Fateh Singh was formally elected president. Capturing the Shiromanī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee was the dissidents' next objective. A no-confidence motion was brought forth on October 2, 1962, against the sitting president, Kirpāl Singh Chakksherewālā, which was carried by 76 votes to 72. Sant Channan Singh, a right-hand man of Sant Fateh Singh, was elected the new president.

The Shiromanī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee was now in the hands of Sant Fateh Singh. He also controlled the dominant section of the Shiromanī Akālī Dal which had split into two. The two Dals kept up a running feud. Punjabi Sūbā remained the principal plank for both, but their energies were consumed more in mutual recrimination. A truce was called as the country faced a Chinese attack in 1962. The leaders of the two groups sat together in a meeting at Motībāgh Palace, Patiālā, on December 24, 1962, to plan how to have the Sikhs contribute their maximum to the war effort. Mahārājā Yādavindra Singh

was nominated Mahā Jathedār of the Panth to mobilize the community. Chief Minister Partāp Singh Kairon had already launched a large-scale campaign to rally the Punjab. He had raised a voluntary corps which consisted mainly of rural Sikhs. The resounding success Kairon achieved made even some of the ruling party in Delhi feel jealous of him.

The two Akālī Dals resumed their militant postures as soon as the hostilities ceased. The fortunes of the Master Akālī Dal were visibly on the decline. They received a severe setback when in the Gurdwārā elections on January 17, 1965, the rival faction won a clear majority. The Sant Akālī Dal annexed 90 seats, conceding only 45 to Master Tārā Singh. Among those who lost were two of the latter's leading candidates, Kartār Singh Dīwānā and Kanwarānī Jagdīsh Kaur of Farīdkot. After a while, Master Tārā Singh stepped aside, withdrawing himself from active politics to leave the field open for Sant Fateh Singh. He took to the hills and quarantined himself in a small village, Salogarā, spending his time in prayer and contemplation.

A development which helped to focus attention afresh on the Sikhs' political objective was the Nalwā Conference. Named after the famous general of Sikh times, Harī Sigh Nalwā, it was convened at Ludhiānā on July 4, 1965. The main Conference resolution, drawn up by Sardār Kapūr Singh, eminent Sikh scholar and intellectual, was moved by Sardār Gurnām Singh, then leader of the Opposition in the Punjab Legislative Assembly, and seconded by Giānī Bhupinder Singh, president of the Master Tārā Singh Akālī Dal. The resolution ran as follows :

> This Conference in commemoration of General Hari Singh Nalwa of historical fame reminds all concerned that the Sikh people are makers of history and are conscious of their political destiny in a free India.
>
> 2. This Conference recalls that the Sikh people agreed to merge in a common Indian nationality on the explicit understanding of being accorded a constitutional status of co-sharers in the Indian sovereignty along with the majority community, which solemn understanding now stands cynically repudiated by the present rulers of India. Further, the Sikh people have been systematically reduced to a sub-political status in their homeland, the Punjab, and to an insignificant position in their motherland, India. The Sikhs are in a position to establish

> before an impartial international tribunal, uninfluenced by the present Indian rulers that the law, the judicial process, and the executive action of the State of India is consistently and heavily weighted against the Sikhs and is administered with unbandaged eyes against Sikh citizens.
>
> 3. This Conference, therefore, resolves, after careful thought, that there is left no alternative for the Sikhs in the interest of self-preservation but to frame their political demand for securing a self-determined political status within the Republic of Union of India.

This demand for a self-determined political status for the Sikhs was more radical than the demand for a Punjabi Sūbā. It had the immediate effect of breaking the stillness which brooded over the political scene and of stimulating the process of history.

On July 24, 1965, Master Tārā Singh ended his six-month-old self-exile and announced his re-entry into politics. He first made a trip to Pakistan to pay homage at Nankānā Sāhib and perform there the concluding ceremonies for a recitation of the Guru Granth he had completed during his retirement. On August 2, 1965, he addressed a Press conference in Delhi, demanding for the Sikhs "place in the sun of free India." He applauded the Nalwā Conference resolution and pledged his support to it.

But the initiative was again seized by Sant Fateh Singh with the announcement on August 16, 1965, that, to clinch the Punjabi Sūbā issue, he would sit afasting from September 10, 1965, and, in case the Government of India did not melt, he would burn himself up on September 25. The venue fixed for immolation was the top roof of the Akāl Takht; time: 4.30 p.m. Following upon the heels of this declaration came the war between Pakistan and India. In that moment of crisis, everyone wished that Sant Fateh Singh would revoke his decision.

Sant Channan Singh, president of the Shiromanī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee, Gurcharan Singh Tauhrā and Harcharan Singh Hudiārā went to Delhi on September 8, 1956, to take counsel with the leaders of government and others. A high-level meeting took place in the Speaker's chamber in Parliament House attended among others by Mahārājā Yādavindra Singh of Patiālā, Yashwant Rāo Chavān, Defence Minister, Jaisukhlāl Hāthī, Minister of

State for Home Affairs, Sardār Kapūr Singh, Member of Parliament, Dr Anūp Singh, Member of Parliament, Sardār Būtā Singh, Member of Parliament, and Sardār Dhannā Singh Gulshan. They were all anxious that the tragedy be somehow averted and unanimously sent a message to Sant Fateh Singh requesting him to defer the fast. Some of them, notably the Mahārājā of Patiālā, added the assurance that they would be on his side if the government continued to circumvent his demand after normalcy was restored.

Sant Channan Singh returned to Amritsar with his colleagues by the night train and conveyed to Sant Fateh Singh on the morning of September 9 the message they had brought. Sant Fateh Singh accepted the advice and made a public statement postponing the fast. Simultaneously, he appealed to his countrymen, especially Sikhs, to muster all their resources to resist the onslaught from across the frontier.

In the border districts, the Sikh population rose to a man to meet the crisis. It stood solidly behind the combatants and assisted them in many different ways. It provided guides to the newly inducted troops and offered free labour and vehicles, country carts, tractors and trucks to transport war supplies to the forward-most trenches. Instead of evacuating in panic to safer places, Sikhs right up to the frontier stuck fearlessly to their homes, plying their ploughs and tending their cattle. Along the main approach routes to the front, they set up booths serving refreshments to the soldiers. Their most spectacular feat was the way they swooped down upon the parachutists dropped by Pakistanis behind the Indian lines. On seeing the parachutes open up in the skies, the villagers rushed out gleefully with whatever they had in their hands—*lāṭhīs*, axes or swords, and seized the bewildered paratroopers before they knew where they were. A few were beaten to death on the spot and the rest were handed over to the army. A South Indian pilot belonging to the Air Force, who had made an emergency leap from his crashing aircraft, had a hard time explaining to his rugged, but prompt, captors that he was an Indian national and not a Pakistani spy.

Besides a vast number of Sikh troops fighting all along the border from Kutch to Bāltistān and Ladākh, almost all senior commanders in the Punjab sector were Sikhs. Lieut-General

Harbakhsh Singh, with his chief of staff, Major-General Joginder Singh, commanded the entire Western zone and was, as such, the principal architect of India's victory. Involved with planning at the army headquarters was another Sikh officer, Major-General Narinder Singh. Lieut-General Joginder Singh Dhillon, a brilliant tactician, with his Brigadier General Staff, Brigadier Parkāṣh Singh Grewāl, and artillery commandar, Brigadier S.S. Kalhā, commanded the corps operating in the Punjab and parts of Rajasthan. Major-General Niranjan Prasād was replaced mid-battle by Major-General Mohindar Singh, a tough and shrewd soldier, as division commander in the Amritsar sector, the other division commander, in the Khem Karan sector, being Major-General Gurbakhsh Singh. The two divisions not only secured their first objective, the Ichogil Canal, but at certain points advanced even farther, holding Lahore within artillery range. North of the Rāvī, Major-General Rājinder Singh 'Sparrow', commanding an armoured division, recorded a marvellous feat in the history of tank warfare by a lightning putsch towards Siālkot-Nārowāl, his Centurions humbling Pakistan's prestigious American-gifted Pattons and Chaffees. The Khem Karan sector, too, was turned into what came to be known as the graveyard of the Pakistani Patton tanks. South of the Sutlej, Brigadier Bant Singh, commanding an independent brigade group, defended stoutly an extensive border covering the entire Ferozepore and Gangānagar districts. Both at Hussainīwālā and Fāzilkā, Sikh battalion commanders held fast to their positions despite intensely heavy shelling by Pakistan artillery. The Indian Air Force, under the command of the Sikh Air Chief Marshal, Arjan Singh, made devastating strikes and surprised military experts the world over by decisively outpacing a far superior, i.e. better-equipped, force: Indian Moths had routed Pakistani Hawks.

Within 21 days, Pakistan was brought to heel. The ceasefire came about on September 22. Legendary stories were already in circulation about the partiotic fervour and bravery Sikhs had displayed during the war. Clearly, their moment of fulfilment had arrived. On September 6, 1965, the Union Home Minister, Gulzārī Lāl Nandā, had made a statement in the Lok Sabha saying that "the whole question of formation of Punjabi-speaking state could be examined afresh with an open mind." On

September 23, recalling his statement of September 6, he announced in the Lok Sabha: "The Government have now decided to set up a committee of the Cabinet to pursue this matter further. The Committee will consist of Shrimati Indira Gandhi, Shri Y.B. Chavan and Shri Mahavir Tyagi." Addressing the Speaker, the Home Minister said : "Sir, I would request you and the Chairman, Rajya Sabha, to set up for the same purpose a Parliamentary Committee of members of both Houses of Parliament presided over by you." Continuing his speech, he expressed the hope that "the efforts of this Cabinet Committee and of the Parliamentary Committee will lead to a satisfactory settlement of the question." The Congress party also took up the issue in earnest. On November 16, 1965, the Punjab Congress Committee debated it for long hours, with Giānī Zail Singh, General Mohan Singh, and Narāin Singh Shāhbāzpurī lending it their full support.

The Home Minister sent a list of nominees from Rajya Sabha to the Chairman and a list of nominees from Lok Sabha to the Speaker, Sardār Hukam Singh. The Chairman forwarded his list to the Speaker. The latter, however, did not accept the Lok Sabha list given him by the Home Minister, and made five changes in it at his own discretion. The twenty-two-member committee announced by Sardār Hukam Singh represented all sections of the House. Among them were Hiren Mukherjee (Communist), Surendra Nāth Dwivedī (Socialist), Atal Behārī Vājpāyee (Jana Sangh), Mahārājā Karnī Singh of Bīkāner (Independent), Dhannā Singh Gulshan (Akālī Dal), Bansī Lāl (Congress), Sādiq Alī (Congress), Amar Nāth Vidyālankār (Congress), Surjīt Singh Majīthīā (Congress) and Dayā Bhāī Patel (Swatantra). The first meeting of the committee was held in the committee room of Parliament House to lay down its procedure of work. October 1, 1965, to November 5, 1965, was the period fixed for receiving memoranda from various parties and individuals. From November 26 to December 25, the committee held preliminary discussions. On January 10, 1966, Lachhman Singh Gill, general secretary of the Shiromanī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee, and Rawel Singh, a member of its executive, met the committee and presented the case for a Punjabi-speaking state. On January 27, Giānī Kartār Singh and Sardār Harcharan Singh Brār appeared before the

committee on behalf of the Congress group in the Punjab legislature. Both argued in favour of Punjabi Sūbā. There were nearly 2,200 memoranda submitted to the committee favouring the Punjabi Sūbā and 903 opposing it.

Sardār Hukam Singh was able to secure from his committee a unanimous vote in favour of the creation of Punjabi Sūbā. This apparently dismayed Gulzārī Lāl Nandā, the Home Minister, who soon after the nomination of the Parliamentary Committee had borne complaints to Prime Minister Lāl Bahādur Shāstrī alleging that the Speaker was actively working for the creation of a Punjabi-speaking state. The Parliamentary Committee's report was handed in on March 15, 1966. On March 9, 1966, the Congress Working Committee had already adopted a motion recommending to the Government of India to carve a Punjabi-speaking state out of the then-existing Punjab. The only member to oppose the resolution was Morārjī Desāī. The report of the Parliamentary Committee was made public on March 18, 1966. Mrs Indira Gandhi who had, after the sudden death of Lāl Bahādur Shāstrī, taken over as Prime Minister on January 24, 1966, finally conceded the demand on April 23, 1966. A commission was appointed to demarcate the new states of Punjab and Haryāna. On September 3, the Punjab Reorganization Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha and on November 1, 1966, Punjabi-speaking state became a reality. The happiest man on that day was Sant Fateh Singh. A lifelong bachelor, he greeted the announcement with the words: "A handsome baby has been born into my household."

With the birth of the new Punjab, Sikhs had entered the most creative half-decade of their modern history. The realization of a dominant political ambition oftentimes heralds the advent of political power. This came strikingly true for Sikhs in the Punjab. On March 8, 1967, Gurnām Singh, the Akālī nominee, took over as Chief Minister of the state. This was the time when the Green Revolution which was the creation mainly of the Sikhs started showing results. The beginnings of the Green Revolution go back to 1963 when about 150 strains of dwarf wheat were received in India from Dr N.E. Borlaug, in Mexico. They were distributed among wheat breeders in Ludhiānā, Delhi and Kānpur. Research on three chosen strains was carried on at the Punjab Agricultural University at

Ludhiānā under Dr D.S. Athwāl. Seeds were multiplied and demonstrations were laid out on private farms. By 1966 these demonstrations had spread over a large area; by 1969 the entire agricultural area in the Punjab had turned into one vast demonstration field. The Punjab's, and thereby India's, granary was full. For Sikhs in the Punjab, a new era of economic well-being had opened.

In 1966-67, Sikhs observed the 300th birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh and in 1969 the quinquecentennial of Guru Nānak's birth in a tone and verve that come only out of a settled and consolidated psyche. Both events generated much literary and cultural activity which brought to Sikhs a new awareness of their religious heritage. At about the same time occurred two altogether momentous developments—the exodus of Sikhs from Africa into the United Kingdom and the extraordinary dissemination of the Sikh faith through the work of Yogī Harbhajan Singh in the United States of America. The true import of these must extend into, and be unravelled by, future history.

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